Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

MAY 1953

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MAY, 1953 Vol. 6, No. 2

Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!

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Cover by MEL HUNTER, Showing RESCUE ABOVE THE MOON

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GUEFFEF ON PROGREFF

IN the year 2034, traffic experts predict, automobiles will outnumber people.

That recent news item was printed as practically a sure bet, since it was done by experts dealing with hard facts.

If it had appeared as science fiction, the likelihood is that it would not have caused glee among car manufacturers, oil refiners, mechanics, and dismay among drivers, traffic cops and highway planners.

There must, after all, be a great difference between statistical analysis and fiction exploring *possibilities,* which is what science fiction does.

Actually, the traffic experts used exactly the methods of any writer of science fiction:

They gave top priority to a coupled trend — population growth and increased ownership of cars — to produce an intelligible extrapolation.

If this prediction had been submitted to me as the basis of a story, however, here are the questions I'd want taken care of in a logical and convincing way:

• How is it that nothing has replaced the automobile long before 2034? As a means of transportation, it's far from satisfactory, being wasteful of fuel, space, metals, roads, labor and lives.

• Will fuel and materials hold out to that extent? It's not possible unless a cheaper and more plentiful fuel is used, and metals are replaced by plastics.

• Since the driving and parking problems would be even more of a headache than now, is it reasonable to expect people to buy more and more cars? Why? How are these problems solved? For they must be solved or the majority would rather not own cars.

• Automobiles will outnumber people *where* in 2034?

• To what extent?

• With what results in the lives of car owners, appearance of city and countryside, counter-advertising of competitive products to pull away sales, counter-counter-advertising to keep up sales of cars?

And there you have an approximate notion of the way a theme should be worked out in science fiction. Handled routinely, it would probably become a sad little tale of a housewife afraid that her husband will be in an accident on the grotesquely murderous highways, and he would, of course; or a wild rebellion of pedestrians against the tyranny of the automobile autocracy. A more thoughtful writer would have his characters try to get along in such a congested society.

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Whoever wrote it, though, would be faced with the need to guess beyond present knowledge, as the literature of surmise has always had to do.

You'd expect an expert to anticipate developments in his field, but nobody, however trained and ingenious, can foresee the shock discoveries that explode so abruptly, with no prior warning, on society — steam power, bacteriology, radioactivity, internal combustion, antibiotics — and with such violence that civilization is shot ahead as if out of a gun.

That applies only to invention, a tough enough matter. But how about customs, attitudes, modes of life? We're writing of civilizations millenia away, and yet the gap between the 18th Century and today is almost unthinkable. This is how our age might have looked to a writer of that time:

"By ftage to Bofton, which great diftance waf covered at an aftonifhing 15 milef an hour. Our driver ftated that thif if accomplifhed by breeding horfef of great fpeed and endurance.

"The peftilence in Bofton caufed by miafmic air haf been erafed in a moft ingeniouf manner: Trained falconf haraff leff predatory birdf into beating their wingf over the city, thuf difpelling the noxiouf atmofphere."

We don't use the antique "S" any longer, but there were other customs equally inviolable to the hypothetical 18th Century writer:

- He poured away what we call tea and ate the leaves with melted butter.
- He enjoyed chocolate-covered sausages.
- He paid the postage on the mail he received.
- His marriage was arranged for him — an economic matter because a family was a financial asset.
- When he didn't pay his debts, he went to prison.
- If he couldn't afford tutors, his children remained illiterate.
- He knew the future would be different, but he expected to be able to recognize it if he should somehow see it. He was wrong, obviously.

DOES good science fiction, then, pretend to describe the actual future? No, certainly not. Anyone who thinks so is missing the point—like an engineer trying to harness the energy of noisemakers at a New Year's party.

We're having fun with ideas, making first this one and then that predominant *just to see what might happen if.*

In 2034, I predict, traffic experts will outnumber all cars and car owners. Bet I can "prove" it, too!

—H. L. GOLD

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WHEREVER YOU

Even today machinery can be repaired with hairpins and kept running with a kick—and harder kicks will mean more power!

MATT refused to believe it. Vacant incredulity paralyzed him for a moment as he stared after the fleeing, bounding tire. Then, with a sudden release, he sprinted after it.

"Stop!" he yelled futilely. "Stop, damn it!"

With what seemed like sadistic glee, the tire bounced high in the air and landed going faster than ever. Matt pounded down the hot dusty road for a hundred yards before he pulled up even with it. He knocked it over on its side. The tire lay there, spinning and frustrate, like a turtle on its back. Matt glared at it suspiciously. Sweat trickled down his neck.

A tinkling of little silver bells. Laughter? Matt looked up quickly, angrily. The woods were thin along the top of this Ozark ridge. Descending to the lake, sparkling cool and blue far below, they grew thicker, but the only one near was the young girl shuffling through the dust several hundred yards beyond the crippled car. And her head was bent down to

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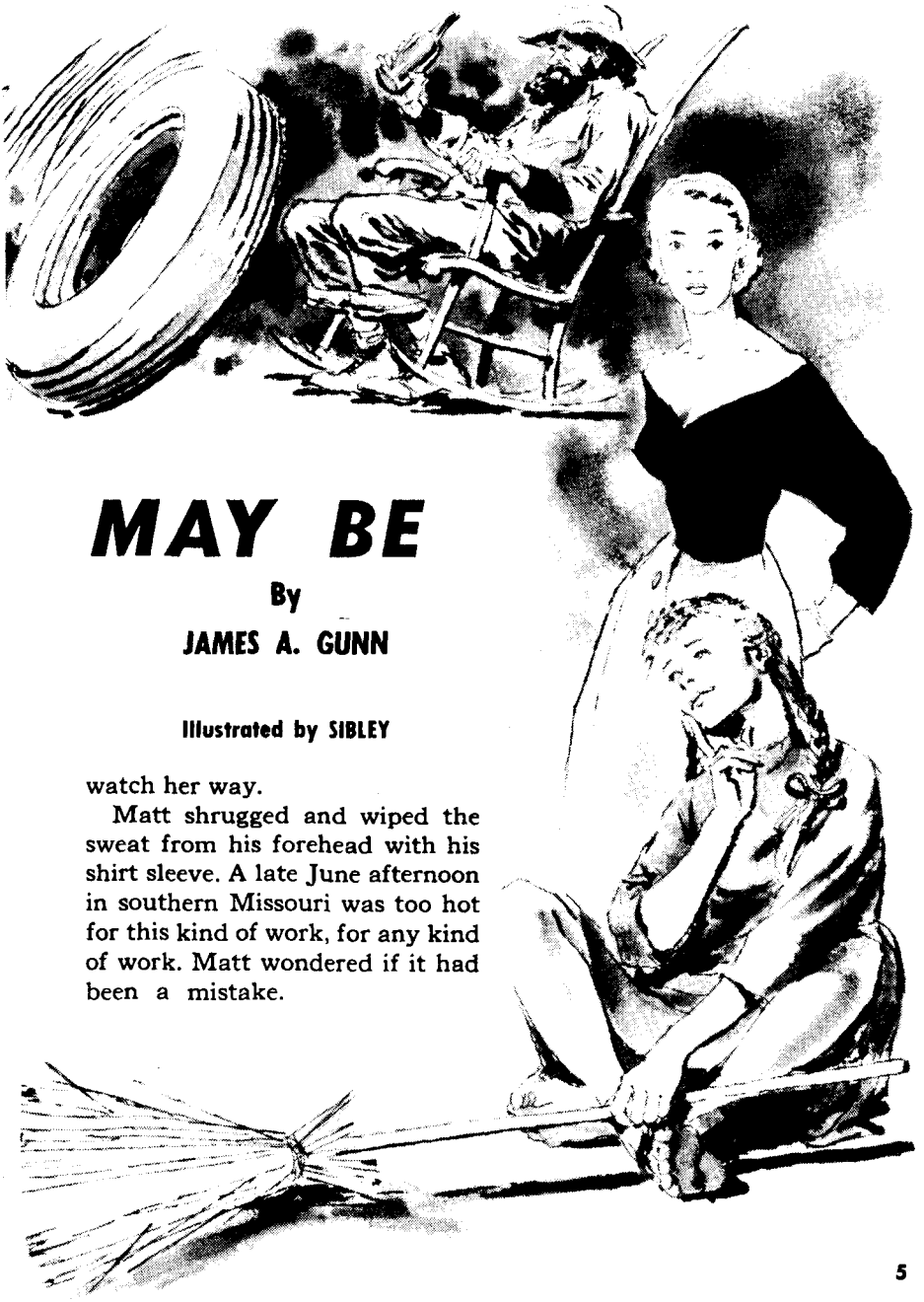

MAY BE

By

JAMES A. GUNN

Illustrated by SIBLEY

watch her way.

Matt shrugged and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his shirt sleeve. A late June afternoon in southern Missouri was too hot for this kind of work, for any kind of work. Matt wondered if it had been a mistake.

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IN shimmering heat waves and a slowly settling haze of red dust, he righted the tire and began to roll it back toward the green Ford with one bare metal wheel drum pointing upward at a slight angle. The tire rolled easily, as if it repented its brief dash for freedom, but it was a dirty job and Matt's hands and clothes were soiled red when he reached the car.

With one hand clutching the tire, Matt studied the road for a moment. He could have sworn that he had stopped on one of the few level stretches in these hills, but the tire had straightened up from the side of the car and started rolling as if the car were parked on a steep incline.

Matt reflected bitterly on the luck that had turned a slow leak into a flat only twenty-five miles from the cabin. It couldn't have happened on the highway, ten miles back, where he'd have been able to pull into a service station. No, it had to wait until he couldn't get out of this rutted cow track. The tire's escapade had been only the most recent of a series of annoyances and irritations to which bruised shins and scraped knuckles were painful affidavits.

He sighed. After all, he had wanted isolation. Guy's offer of a hunting cabin in which to finish his thesis had seemed like a godsend at the time, but now Matt wasn't so certain. If this was a fair sample, Matt was beginning to see how much of his time would be wasted just on the problems of existence.

Cautiously, Matt rolled the tire to the rear of the car, laid it carefully on its side, and completed pulling the spare from the trunk. Warily, he maneuvered the spare to the left rear wheel, knelt, lifted it, fitted it over the bolts, and stepped back. He sighed again, but this time with relief.

Kling-ng! Klang! Rattle!

Matt hastily looked down. His foot was at least two inches from the hub cap, but it was rocking now, empty. Matt saw the last nut roll under the car.

Matt's swearing was vigorous, systematic, and exhaustive. It concerned itself chiefly with the perversity of inanimate objects.

There was something about machines and the things they made which was basically alien to the human spirit. They might disguise themselves for a time as willing slaves, but eventually, inevitably, they turned against their masters. At the psychological moment, they rebelled.

Or perhaps it was the difference in people. For some people, things always went wrong—their cakes fell; their lumber split; their golf balls sliced into the rough. Others established a mysterious

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sympathy with their tools.

Luck? Skill? Coordination? Experience?

It was, he felt, something more conscious and malignant.

MATT remembered a near-disastrous brush with chemistry; he had barely passed qualitative analysis. For him the tests had been worse than useless. Faithfully he had gone through every step of the endless ritual: precipitate, filter, dissolve, precipitate . . . And then he would take his painfully secured, neatly written results to—what was his name?—Wadsworth, and the little chemistry professor would study his analysis and look up, frowning.

"Didn't you find any whatyoumaycallit oxide?" he would ask.

"Whatyoumaycallit oxide?" Startled. "Oh, there wasn't any whatyoumaycallit oxide."

And Wadsworth would make a simple test and, sure enough, there would be the whatyoumaycallit oxide.

There was the inexplicably misshapen gear Matt had made on the milling machine, the drafting pen that would not draw a smooth line no matter how much he sanded the point . . .

It had convinced Matt that his hands were too clumsy to belong to an engineer. He had transferred his ambitions to a field where tools were less tangible. Now he wondered.

Kobolds? Accident prones?

Some time he would have to write it up. It would make a good paper for the *Journal of* —

Laughter! This time there was no possible doubt. It came from right behind him.

Matt whirled. The girl stood there, hugging her ribs to keep the laughter in. She was a young little thing, not much over five feet tall, in a shapeless, faded, blue dress. Her feet were small and bare and dirty. Her hair, in long braids, was mouse-colored. Her pale face was saved from plainness only by her large, blue eyes.

Matt flushed. "What the devil are you laughing at?"

"You!" she got out between chuckles. "Whyn't you get a horse?"

"Did that remark just arrive here?"

He swallowed his irritation, turned, and got down on his hands and knees to peer under the car. One by one he gathered up the nuts, but the last one, inevitably, was out of reach. Sweating, he crawled all the way under.

WHEN he came out, the girl was still there. "What are you waiting for?" he asked bitingly.

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"Nothin'." But she stood with her feet planted firmly in the red dust.

Kibitzers annoyed Matt, but he couldn't think of anything to do about it. He twirled the nuts onto the bolts and tightened them up, his neck itching. It might have been the effect of sweat and dust, but he was not going to give the girl the satisfaction of seeing him rub it. That annoyed him even more. He tapped the hub cap into place and stood up.

"Why don't you go home?" he asked sourly.

"Cain't," she said.

He went to the rear of the car and released the jack. "Why not?"

"I run away." Her voice was quietly tragic.

Matt turned to look at her. Her blue eyes were large and moist. As he watched, a single tear gathered and traced a muddy path down her cheek.

Matt hardened his heart. "Tough." He picked up the flat and stuffed it into the trunk and slammed the lid. The sun was getting lower, and on this forgotten lane to nowhere it might take him the better part of an hour to drive the twenty-five miles.

He slid into the driver's seat and punched the starter button. After one last look at the forlorn little figure in the middle of the road, he shook his head savagely and let in the clutch.

"Mister! Hey, mister!"

He slammed on the brakes and stuck his head out the window. "Now what do you want?"

"Nothin'," she said mournfully. "Only you forgot your jack."

Matt jammed the gear shift into reverse and backed up rapidly. Silently, he got out, picked up the jack, opened the trunk, tossed in the jack, slammed the lid. But as he brushed past her again, he hesitated. "Where are you going?"

"No place," she said.

"What do you mean 'no place'? Don't you have any relatives?" She shook her head. "Friends?" he asked hopefully. She shook her head again. "All right, then, go on home!"

He slid into the car and banged the door. She was not his concern. The car jerked into motion. No doubt she would go home when she got hungry enough. He shifted into second, grinding the gears. Even if she didn't, someone would take her in. After all, he was no welfare agency.

He grudgingly slowed, then angrily backed up and skidded to a stop beside the girl.

"Get in," he said.

TRYING to keep the car out of the ruts was trouble enough, but the girl jumped up and down on the seat beside him, squealing happily.

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SHE glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. "I'm sixteen," she said. "Most girls my age got a couple of young 'uns. One, anyways."

Matt looked at her sharply. Sixteen? It seemed impossible. The dress was shapeless enough to hide almost anything—but sixteen! Then he remembered the thigh.

She frowned. "Get married, get married! You'd think I didn't want to get married. 'Tain't my fault no feller wants me."

"I can't understand that," Matt said sarcastically.

She smiled at him. "You're nice."

She looked almost pretty when she smiled. For a hill girl.

"What seems to be the trouble?" Matt asked hurriedly.

"Partly Paw," she said. "No one'd want to have him around. But mostly I guess I'm just unlucky." She sighed. "One feller I went with purty near a year. He busted his leg. Another nigh drownded when he fell in the lake. Don't seem right they should blame me, even if we did have words."

"Blame you?"

She nodded vigorously. "Them as don't hate me say it's courtin' disaster 'stead of a gal. The others weren't so nice. Fellers stopped comin'. One of 'em said he'd rather marry up with a catamount. You married, Mister—Mister—?"

"Matthew Wright. No, I'm not married."

She nodded thoughtfully. "Wright. Abigail Wright. That's purty."

"Abigail *Wright*?"

"Did I say that? Now, ain't that funny? My name's Jenkins."

Matt gulped. "You're going home," he said with unshakable conviction. "You can tell me how to get there or you can climb out of the car right now."

"But Paw—"

"Where the devil did you think I was taking you?"

"Wherever you're going," she said, wide-eyed.

"For God's sake, you can't go with me! It wouldn't be decent."

"Why not?" she asked innocently.

In silence, Matt began to apply the brakes.

"All right," she sighed. She wore an expression the early Christians must have worn before they were marched into the arena. "Turn right at the next cross road."

CHICKENS scattered in front of the wheels, fluttering and squawking; pigs squealed in a pen beside the house. Matt stopped in front of the shanty, appalled. If the two rooms and sagging porch had ever known paint, they

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"Careful of those notes," he said, indicating the bulging manila folders on the seat between them. "There's over a year's work in those."

Her eyes were wide as she watched him place the folders in the back seat on top of the portable typewriter that rested between the twenty-pound sack of flour and the case of eggs.

"A year's work?" she echoed wonderingly.

"Notes. For the thesis I'm going to write."

"You write stories?"

"A research paper I have to do to get my degree." He glanced at her blank expression and then looked back at the road. "It's called," he said with a nasty superior smile, " 'The Psychodynamics of Witchcraft, with Special Reference to the Salem Trials of 1692.' "

"Oh," she said wisely. "Witches." As if she knew all about witches.

Matt felt unreasonably annoyed. "All right, where do you live?"

She stopped bouncing and got very quiet. "I cain't go home."

"Why not?" he demanded. "And don't tell me 'I run away,' " he imitated nasally.

"Paw'd beat me again. He'd purty nigh skin me alive, I guess."

"You mean he *hits* you?"

"He don't use his fists—not often. He uses his belt mostly. Look." She pulled up the hem of her dress and the leg of a pair of baggy drawers that appeared to be made from some kind of sacking.

Matt looked quickly and glanced away. Across the back of one thigh was an ugly dark bruise. But the leg seemed unusually well rounded for a girl so small and young. Matt frowned thoughtfully. Did girls in the hills *mature* that early?

He cleared his throat. "Why does he do that?"

"He's just mean."

"He must have some reason."

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "he beats me when he's drunk 'cause he's drunk, and he beats me when he's sober 'cause he ain't drunk. That covers it mostly."

"But what does he say?"

She glanced at him shyly. "Oh, I cain't repeat it."

"I mean what does he want you to do?"

"Oh, that!" She brooded over it. "He thinks I ought to get married. He wants me to catch some strong young feller who'll do the work when he moves in with us. A gal don't bring in no money, he says, leastwise not a good one. That kind only eats and wants things."

"Married?" Matt said. "But you're much too young to get married."

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had enjoyed only a nodding acquaintance, and that a generation before.

A large brooding figure sat on the porch, rocking slowly in a rickety chair. He was dark, with a full black beard and a tall head of hair.

"That's Paw," Abigail whispered in fright.

Matt waited uneasily, but the broad figure of her father kept on rocking as if strangers brought back his daughter every day. *Maybe they do,* Matt thought with irritation.

"Well," he said nervously, "here you are."

"I cain't get out," Abigail said. "Not till I find out if Paw's goin' to whale me. Go talk to him. See if he's mad at me."

"Not me," Matt stated with certainty, glancing again at the big, black figure rocking slowly, ominously silent. "I've done my duty in bringing you home. Good-by. I won't say it's been a pleasure knowing you."

"You're nice and mighty handsome. I'd hate to tell Paw you'd taken advantage of me. He's a terror when he's riled."

For one horrified moment, Matt stared at Abigail. Then, as she opened her mouth, he opened the door and stepped out. Slowly he walked up to the porch and put one foot on its uneven edge.

"Uh," he said. "I met your daughter on the road."

Jenkins kept on rocking.

"She'd run away," Matt went on.

Jenkins was silent. Matt studied the portion of Jenkins's face that wasn't covered with hair. There wasn't much of it, but what there was Matt didn't like.

"I brought her back," Matt finished desperately.

Jenkins rocked and said nothing. Matt spun around and walked quickly back to the car. He went around to the window where Abigail sat. He reached through the window, opened the glove compartment, and drew out a full pint bottle.

"Remind me," he said, "never to see you again." He marched back to the porch. "Care for a little drink?"

ONE large hand reached out, smothered the pint, and brought it close to faded blue overalls. The cap was twisted off by the other hand. The bottle was tilted toward the unpainted porch ceiling as soon as the neck disappeared into the matted whiskers. The bottle gurgled. When it was lowered, it was only half full.

"Weak," the beard said. But the hand that held the bottle held it tight.

"I brought your daughter back," Matt said, starting again.

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"Why?" he asked.

"She had no place to go. I mean—after all, this is her home."

"She run away," the beard said. Matt found the experience extremely unnerving.

"Look, Mr. Jenkins, I realize that teen-age daughters can be a nuisance, and after meeting your daughter I think I can understand how you feel. Still in all, she is your daughter."

"Got my doubts."

Matt gulped and tried once more. "A happy family demands a lot of compromise, give-and-take on both sides. Your daughter may have given you good cause to lose your temper, but beating a child is never sound psychology. Now if you—"

"Beat her?" Jenkins rose from his chair. It was an awesome thing, like Neptune rising out of the sea in all his majesty, gigantic, bearded, and powerful. Even subtracting the height of the porch, Jenkins loomed several inches over Matt's near six feet. "Never laid a hand to her. Dassn't."

My God, thought Matt, *the man is trembling!*

"Come in here," said Jenkins. He waved the pint toward the open door, a dark rectangle.

Uneasily, Matt walked into the room. Under his feet, things gritted and cracked.

Jenkins lit a kerosene lamp and turned it up. The room was a shambles. Broken dishes littered the floor. Wooden chairs were smashed and splintered. In the center of the room, a table on its back waved three rough legs helplessly in the air; the fourth leg sagged pitifully from its socket.

"She did this?" Matt asked weakly.

"This ain't nothin'." Jenkins' voice quavered; it was a terrible sound to come from that massive frame. "You should see the other room."

"But how? I mean *why?*"

"I ain't a-sayin' Ab done it," Jenkins said, shaking his head. His beard wobbled near Matt's nose. "But when she gets onhappy, things happen. And she was powerful onhappy when that Duncan boy tol' her he wan't comin' back. Them chairs come up from the floor and slam down. That table went dancin' round the room till it fell to pieces. Then dishes come a-flyin' through the air. Look!"

His voice was full of self-pity as he turned his head around and parted his long, matted hair. On the back of his head was a large, red swelling. "I hate to think what happened to that Duncan boy."

HE shook his head sorrowfully. "Now, mister, I guess I got ever' right to lay my hand to that gal. Ain't I?" he demanded fierce-

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ly, but his voice broke.

Matt stared at him blankly.

"But whop her? Me? I sooner stick my hand in a nest of rattlers."

"You mean to say that those things happened all by themselves?"

"That's what I said. I guess it kinder sticks in your craw. Wouldn't have believe it myself, even seein' it and feelin' it—" he rubbed the back of his head—"if it ain't happen afore. Funny things happen around Ab, ever since she started fillin' out, five-six year ago."

"But she's only sixteen," Matt objected.

"Sixteen?" Jenkins glanced warily around the room and out the door toward the car. He lowered his voice to a harsh whisper. "Don't let on I tol' you, but Ab allus was a fibber. She's past eighteen!"

From a shelf, a single unbroken dish crashed to the floor at Jenkins' feet. He jumped and began to shake.

"See?" he whispered plaintively.

"It fell," Matt said.

"She's witched." Jenkins took a feverish swallow from the bottle. "Maybe I ain't been a good Paw to her. Ever since her Maw died, she run wild and got all kinda queer notions. 'Taint allus been bad. For years I ain't had to go fer water. That barrel by the porch is allus filled. But ever since she got to the courtin' age and started bein' disappointed in fellers round about, she been mighty hard to live with. No one'll come nigh the place. And things keep a-movin' and a-jumpin' around till a man cain't trust his own chair to set still under him. It gets you, son. A man kin only stand so much!"

To Matt's dismay, Jenkins's eyes began to fill with large tears. "Got no friend no more to offer me a drink now and again, sociable-like, or help me with the chores, times I got the misery in my back. I ain't a well man, son. Times it's more'n I kin do to get outa bed in the mornin'.

"Look, son," Jenkins said, turning to Matt pleadingly. "Yore a city feller. Yore right nice-lookin' with manners and edyacation. I reckon Ab likes you. Whyn't you take her with you?" Matt started retreating toward the door. "She's right purty when she fixes up and she kin cook right smart. You'd think a skillet was part of her hand, the way she kin handle one, and you don't even have to marry up with her."

MATT backed away, white-faced and incredulous. "You must be mad. You can't give a girl away like that." He turned to make a dash for the door.

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A heavy hand fell on Matt's shoulder and spun him around. "Son," Jenkins said, his voice heavy with menace, "any man that's alone with a gal more'n twenty minutes, it's thought proper they should get married up quick. Since yore a stranger, I ain't holdin' you to it. But when Ab left me, she stopped bein' my daughter. Nobody asked you to bring her back. That gal," he said woefully, "eats more'n I do."

Matt reached into his hip pocket. He pulled out his billfold and extracted a five dollar bill.

"Here," he said, extending it toward Jenkins, "maybe this will make life a little more pleasant."

Jenkins looked at the money wistfully, started to reach for it, and jerked his hand away.

"I cain't do it," he moaned. "It ain't worth it. You brought her back. You kin take her away."

Matt glanced out the doorway toward the car and shuddered. He added another five to the one in his hand.

Jenkins sweated. His hand crept out. Finally, desperately, he crumpled the bills into his palm. "All right," he said hoarsely. "Them's ten mighty powerful reasons."

Matt ran to the car as if he had escaped from bedlam. He opened the door and slipped in. "Get out," he said sharply. "You're home."

"But Paw—"

"From now on, he'll be a doting father." Matt reached across and opened the door for her. "Good-by."

Slowly Abigail got out. She rounded the car and walked up to the porch, dragging her feet. But when she reached the porch, she straightened up. Jenkins, who was standing in the doorway, shrank back from his five-foot-tall daughter as she approached.

"Dirty, nasty old man," Abigail hissed.

Jenkins flinched. After she had passed, he raised the bottle hastily to his beard. His hand must have slipped. By some unaccountable mischance, the bottle kept rising in the air, mouth downward. The bourbon gushed over his head.

Pathetically, looking more like Neptune than ever, Jenkins peered toward the car and shook his head.

Feverishly, Matt turned the car around and jumped the car out of the yard. It had undoubtedly been an optical illusion. A bottle does not hang in the air without support.

GUY'S cabin should not have been so difficult to find. Although the night was dark, the directions were explicit. But for two hours Matt bounced back and forth along the dirt roads of

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the hills. He got tired and hungry.

For the fourth time, he passed the cabin which fitted the directions in every way but one—it was occupied. Lights streamed from the windows into the night. Matt turned into the steep driveway. He could, at least, ask directions.

As he walked toward the door, the odor of frying ham drifted from the house to tantalize him. Matt knocked, his mouth watering. Perhaps he could even get an invitation to supper.

The door swung open. "Come on in. What kept you?"

Matt blinked. "Oh, no!" he cried. For a frantic moment, it was like the old vaudeville routine of the drunk in the hotel who keeps staggering back to knock on the same door. Each time he is more indignantly ejected until finally he complains, "My God, are you in *all* the rooms?"

"What are you doing here?" Matt asked faintly. "How did you—How *could* you—?"

Abigail pulled him into the cabin. It looked bright and cheerful and clean. The floor was newly swept; a broom leaned in the corner. The two lower bunks on opposite walls were neatly made up. Two places were laid at the table. Food was cooking on the wood stove.

"Paw changed his mind," she said.

"But he couldn't! I gave him—"

"Oh, that." She reached into a pocket of her dress. "Here."

She handed him the two crumpled five dollar bills and a handful of silver and copper that Matt dazedly added up to one dollar and thirty-seven cents.

"Paw said he'd have sent more, but it was all he had. So he threw in some vittles."

He sat down in a chair heavily. "But you couldn't—I didn't know where the place was myself, exactly. I didn't tell you—"

"I always been good at finding things," she said. "Places, things that are lost. Like a cat, I guess."

"But—but—" Matt spluttered, "how did you get here?"

"I rode," she said. Instinctively, Matt's eyes switched to the broom in the corner. "Paw loaned me the mule. I let her go. She'll get home all right."

"But you can't stay here. It's impossible!"

"Now, Mr. Wright," Abigail said soothingly. "My Maw used to say a man should never make a decision on a empty stomach. You just sit there and relax. Supper's all ready. You must be nigh starved."

"There's no decision to be made!" Matt said, but he watched while she put things on the table —thick slices of fried ham with cream gravy, corn on the cob,

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fluffy biscuits, butter, homemade jelly, strong black coffee that was steaming and fragrant. Abigail's cheeks were flushed from the stove, and her face was peaceful. She looked almost pretty.

"I can't eat a bite," Matt told her.

"Nonsense." Abigail filled his plate.

GLUMLY, Matt sliced off a bite of ham and put it in his mouth. It was so tender, it almost melted. Before long he was eating as fast as he could shovel the food into his mouth. The food was delicious; everything was cooked just as he liked it. He had never been able to tell anyone how to fix it that way. But that was the way it was.

He pushed himself back from the table, teetering against the wall on the back legs of his chair, lit a cigarette and watched Abigail pour him a third cup of coffee. He was swept by a wave of contentment.

"If I'd had time I'd a made a peach pie. I make real good peach pie," Abigail said.

Matt nodded lazily. There would be compensations in having someone around to—

"No!" he said violently, thumping down on the two front legs of his chair. "It won't work. You can't stay here. What would people say?"

"Who'd care? — Paw don't. Anyways, I could say we was married."

"No!" Matt said hoarsely. "Please don't do that!"

"Please, Mr. Wright," she pleaded, "let me cook and clean for you. I wouldn't be no trouble, Mr. Wright, honest I wouldn't."

"Look, Abbie!" He took her hand. It was soft and feminine. She stood beside his chair obediently, her eyes cast down. "You're a nice girl, and I like you. You can cook better than anyone I've ever known, and you'll make some man a good wife. But I think too much of you to let you ruin your name by staying here along with me. You'll have to go back to your father."

The life seemed to flow out of her. "All right," she said, so low that it was difficult to hear her.

Dazed at his sudden success, Matt got up and walked toward the door. She followed him, and Matt could almost feel the tears welling in her eyes.

Matt opened the car door for her and helped her in. He circled the front of the car and slid into the driver's seat. Abbie huddled against the far door, small and forlorn.

Since Matt's speech, she hadn't said a word. Suddenly, Matt felt very sorry for her and ashamed, as if he had hit a child. *The poor*

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little thing! he thought. Then he caught himself. He shook his head. For a poor little thing, she had certainly managed to browbeat her father.

He thumbed the starter button, and the motor growled, but it didn't catch. Matt let it whine to a stop and pressed again. The motor moaned futilely. Matt checked the ignition. It was on. Again and again he pushed in the button. The moans got weaker. He tried to roll the car—but the brakes locked.

HE glanced suspiciously at Abigail. *But that's absurd,* he thought. Since he had met Abbie, his thoughts had taken a definite paranoid tinge. It was foolish to blame everything that went wrong on the girl.

But the car wouldn't move. He gave up.

"All right," he sighed. "I can't put you out this far from home. You can sleep here tonight."

Silently, she followed him into the cabin. She helped him tack blankets to the upper bunks on each side of the cabin. They made an effective curtain around the lower beds. As they worked, Matt discovered that he was unusually sensitive to her nearness. There was a sweet, womanly smell to her, and when she brushed against him the spot that was touched came to life—tingling awareness.

When they finished, Abbie reached down and grasped the hem of her dress to pull it off over her head.

"No, no," Matt said hurriedly. "Don't you have any modesty? Why do you think we tacked up those blankets?" He gestured to the bunk on the left hand wall. "Dress and undress in there."

She let the hem of her dress fall, nodded meekly, and climbed into the bunk.

Matt stared after her for a moment and released his breath. He turned and climbed into his own bunk, undressed, and slipped under the blanket. Then he remembered that he had forgotten to turn out the lamps.

He rose on one elbow and heard a soft padding on the floor. The lamps went out, one by one, and the padding faded to the other side of the room. Rustling sounds. Darkness and silence.

"Good night, Mr. Wright." It was a little child's voice in the night.

"Good night, Abbie," he said softly. And then after a moment, firmly, "But don't forget—back you go first thing in the morning."

Before the silence wove a pattern of sleep, Matt heard a little sound from the other bunk. He couldn't quite identify it.

A sob? A snore? Or a muffled titter?

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THE odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee crept into Matt's nightmare of a terrifying pursuit by an implacable and invisible enemy. Matt opened his eyes. The bunk was bright with diffused sunlight; the dream faded. Matt sniffed hungrily and pushed aside the blanket to look out.

All the supplies from the car had been unloaded and neatly stowed away. On a little corner table by the window were his typewriter and precious manila folders, and a stack of blank white paper.

Matt dressed hurriedly in his cramped quarters. When he emerged from his cocoon, Abbie was humming happily as she set breakfast on the table. She wore a different dress this morning—a brown calico that did horrible things for her hair and coloring, but fitted better than the blue gingham. The dress revealed a slim but unsuspectedly mature figure.

How would she look, he wondered briefly, in good clothes and nylons, shoes, and make-up?

The thought crumbled before a fresh onslaught to his senses of the odor and sight of breakfast. The eggs were cooked just right, sunny side up, the white firm but not hard. It was strange how Abbie anticipated his preferences. At first he thought that she had overestimated his appetite, but he stowed away three eggs while Abbie ate two, heartily.

He pushed back his plate with a sigh. "Well," he began. She got very quiet and stared at the floor. His heart melted. He felt too contented; a few hours more wouldn't make any difference. Tonight would be time enough for her to go back. "Well," he repeated, "I guess I'd better get to work."

Abbie sprang to clear the table. Matt walked to the corner where the typewriter was waiting. He sat down in the chair and rolled in a sheet of paper. The table was well arranged for light; it was the right height. Everything considered, it was just about perfect for working.

He stared at the blank sheet of paper. He leafed through his notes. He resisted an impulse to get up and walk around. He rested his fingers lightly on the keys and after a moment lifted them, crossed one leg over the other knee, put his right elbow on the raised leg, and began to finger his chin.

There was only one thing wrong: he didn't feel like working.

Finally he typed in the middle of the page:

THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF WITCHCRAFT

With Special Reference to the Salem Trials of 1692

He double-spaced and stopped.

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IT wasn't that Abbie was noisy; she was too quiet, with a kind of purposeful restraint that is worse than chaos. With one ear Matt listened to the sounds of dishwashing and stacking. And then silence.

Matt stood it as long as he could and turned. Abbie was seated at the table. She was sewing up a hole in the pocket of his other pair of pants. He could almost see the aura of bliss that surrounded her.

Like a child, Matt thought, *playing at domesticity*. But there was something mature about it, too; a mature and basic fulfillment. *If we could all be happy with so little. It's a pity, with so small an ambition, to have the real thing so elusive.*

As if she felt him looking at her, Abbie glanced around and beamed. Matt turned back to his typewriter. It still wouldn't come.

Witchcraft, he began hesitantly, *is the attempt of the primitive mind to bring order out of chaos. It is significant, therefore, that belief in witchcraft fades as an understanding of the natural workings of the physical universe grows more prevalent.*

He let his hands drop. It was all wrong, like an image seen in a distorted mirror. He swung around: "Who wrecked your father's house?"

"Libby," she said.

"Libby?" Matt echoed, "Who's Libby?"

"The other me," Abbie said calmly. "Mostly I keep her bottled up inside, but when I feel sad and unhappy I can't keep her in. Then she gets loose and just goes wild. I can't control her.'"

Good God! Matt thought, *Schizophrenia!* "Where did you get an idea like that?" he asked cautiously.

"When I was born," Abbie said, "I had a twin sister, only she died real quick. Maw said I was stronger and just crowded the life right out of her. When I was bad, Maw used to shake her head and say Libby'd never have been mean or cross or naughty. So when something happened, I started saying Libby done it. It didn't stop a licking, but it made me feel better."

What a thing to tell a child! Matt thought.

"Purty soon I got to believing it, that Libby done the bad things that I got licked for, that Libby was part of me that I had to push deep down so she couldn't get out and get me in trouble. After I"—she blushed—"got older and funny things started happening, Libby come in real handy."

"Can you see her?" Matt ventured.

"Course not," Abbie said reproachfully. "She ain't real."

"Isn't."

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"Isn't real, Abbie said. "Things happen when I feel bad. I can't do anything about it. But you got to explain it somehow . . . I use Libby."

Matt sighed. Abbie wasn't so *crazy—or stupid either.* "You can't control it—ever?"

"Well, maybe a little. Like when I felt kind of mean about that liquor you gave Paw, and I thought how nice it would be if Paw had something wet on the outside for a change."

"How about a tire and a hub cap full of nuts?"

She laughed. Again that tinkling of little silver bells. "You did look funny."

Matt frowned. But slowly his expression cleared and he began to chuckle. "I guess I did."

HE swung back to the typewriter before he realized that he was accepting the events of the last eighteen hours as physical facts and Abbie's explanation as theoretically possible. Did he actually believe that Abbie could —how was he going to express it?—move objects with some mysterious, intangible force? By wishing? Of course he didn't. He stared at the typewriter. Or did he?

He called up a picture of a pint bottle hanging unsupported in mid air, emptying its contents over Jenkins's head. He remembered a dish that jumped from a shelf to shatter on the floor. He thought of a hub cap that dumped its contents into the dirt when his foot was two inches away. And he saw a tire straighten up and begin to roll down a level road.

You can't just dismiss things, he thought. *In any comprehensive scheme of the universe, you must include all valid phenomena. If the accepted scheme of things cannot find a place for it, then the scheme must change.*

Matt shivered. It was a disturbing thought.

The primitive mind believed that inanimate objects had spirits that must be propitiated. With a little sophistication came mythology and its personification—nymphs and sprites, Poseidon and Aeolus—and folklore, with its kobolds and poltergeists.

Sir James Frazer said something about the relationship between science and magic. Man, he said, associates ideas by similarity and by contiguity in space or time. If the association is legitimate, it is science; if illegitimate, it is magic, science's bastard sister.

But if the associations of magic are legitimate, then those of science must be illegitimate, and the two reverse their roles and the modern world is standing on its head.

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Matt felt a little dizzy.

Suppose the primitive mind is wiser than we are. Suppose you can insure good luck by the proper ritual or kill your enemy by sticking a pin in a wax doll. Suppose you can prove it.

You had to have some kind of explanation of unnatural events, the square pegs that do not fit into any of science's round holes. Even Abbie recognized that.

Matt knew what the scientific explanation would be: illusion, delusion, hypnosis, anything which demanded the least possible rearrangement of accepted theory, anything which, in effect, denied the existence of the phenomenon.

BUT how could you really explain it? How could you explain Abbie? Did you believe in the spirits of inanimate objects, directed by Abbie when she was in the proper mood? Did you believe in poltergeists which Abbie ordered about? Did you believe in Libby, the intangible projectable, manipulative external soul?

You had to explain Abbie or your cosmology was worthless.

That man at Duke — Rhine, the parapsychologist — he had a word for it. Telekinesis. That was one attempt to incorporate psychic phenomena into the body of science, or, perhaps, to alter the theoretical universe in order to fit those phenomena into it.

But it didn't explain anything.

Then Matt thought of electricity. *You don't have to explain something in order to use it. You don't have to understand it in order to control it. It helps, but it isn't essential. Understanding is a psychological necessity, not a physical one.*

Matt stared at the words he had written. The seventeenth century. Why was he wasting his time? Here was something immediate. He had stumbled on something that would set the whole world on its ear, or perhaps stand it on its feet again. It would not molder away, as the thesis would in a university library.

Matt turned around. Abbie was sitting at the table, her mending finished, staring placidly out the open doorway. Matt stood up and walked toward her. She turned her head to look at him, smiling slowly. Matt turned his head, searching the room.

"Kin I get you something?" Abbie asked anxiously.

Matt looked down at her. "Here!" he said. He plucked the needle from the spool of darning thread. He forced it lightly into the rough top of the table so that the needle stood upright. "Now," he said defiantly, "make it move."

Abbie stared at him. "Why?"

"I want to see you do it," Matt said firmly. "Isn't that enough?"

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"But I don't want to," Abbie objected. "I never wanted to do it. It just happened."

"Try!"

"No, Mr. Wright," Abbie said firmly. "It never brung me nothing but misery. It scared away all my fellers and all Paw's friends. Folks don't like people who can do things like that. I don't ever want it to happen again."

"If you want to stay here," Matt said flatly, "you'll do as I say."

"Please, Mr. Wright," she begged. "Don't make me do it. It'll spoil everything. It's bad enough when you can't help it, but it's worse when you do it a-purpose — something terrible will come of it."

Matt glowered at her. Her pleading eyes dropped. She bit her lip. She stared at the needle. Her smooth, young forehead tightened.

Nothing happened. The needle remained upright.

Abbie took a deep breath. "I cain't, Mr. Wright," she wailed. "I just cain't do it."

"Why not?" Matt demanded fiercely. "Why can't you do it?"

"I don't know," Abbie said. Automatically her hands began to smooth the pants laid across her lap. She looked down and blushed. "I guess it's 'cause I'm happy."

AFTER a morning of experimentation, Matt's only half-conscious need was still unsatisfied. He had offered Abbie an innumerable assortment of objects: a spool of thread, a fountain pen cap, a dime, a typewriter eraser, a three-by-five note card, a piece of folded paper, a bottle . . . The last Matt considered a stroke of genius. But tip it as he would, the bottle, like all the rest of the objects, remained stolidly unaffected.

He even got the spare tire out of the trunk and leaned it against the side of the car. Fifteen minutes later, it was still leaning there.

Finally, frowning darkly, Matt took a cup from the shelf and put it down on the table. "Here," he said. "You're so good at smashing dishes, smash this."

Abbie stared at the cup hopelessly. Her face seemed old and haggard. After a moment, her body seemed to collapse all at once. "I cain't," she moaned. "I cain't."

"Can't!" Matt shouted. "Can't! Are you so stupid you can't say that? Not 'cain't' — can't!"

Her large blue eyes lifted to Matt's in mute appeal. They began to fill with tears. "I can't," she said. A sob broke from her throat. She put her head down on her arms. Her thin shoulders began to quiver.

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Moodily, Matt stared at her back. Was everything that he had seen merely an illusion? Or did this phenomenon only evidence itself under very rigid conditions? Did she have to be unhappy?

It was not without a certain logic. Neurotic children had played a large part in the history of witchcraft. In one of the English trials, children had reportedly fallen into fits and vomited crooked pins. They could not pronounce such holy names as "Lord," "Jesus," or "Christ," but they could readily speak the names "Satan" or "Devil." Between the middle of the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth, 100,000 persons had been put to death for witchcraft.

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How many had come to the rack, the stake, or the drowning pool, through the accusations of children? A child saw a hag at her door. The next moment she saw a hare run by and the woman had disappeared. On no more convincing evidence than that, the woman was accused of turning herself into a hare by witchcraft.

Why had the children done it? Suggestibility? A desire for attention?

Whatever the reason, it was tainted with abnormality.

In the field of psychic phenomena as well, the investigations of the Society of Psychical Research were full of instances in which neurotic children or neurotic young women played a distinct if inexplicable role.

Did Abbie have to be unhappy? Matt's lips twisted. *If it was true, it was hard on Abbie.*

"Get your things together," Matt said harshly. "You're going home to your father."

Abbie stiffened and looked up, her face tear-streaked but her eyes blazing. "I ain't."

"You are not," Matt corrected sharply.

"I are not," Abbie said fiercely. "I are not. I are not."

Suddenly the cup was sailing toward Matt's head. Instinctively, he put out his hand. The cup hit it and stuck. Matt looked at it dazedly and back at Abbie. Her hands were still in her lap.

"YOU did it!" Matt shouted.

"It's true."

Abbie looked pleased. "Do I have to go back to Paw?"

Matt thought a moment. "No," he said. "Not if you'll help me."

Abbie's lips tightened. "Ain't — isn't once enough, Mr. Wright? You know I can do it. Won't you leave it alone now? It's unlucky. Something awful will happen. I got a feeling." She looked up at his implacable face. "But I'll do it, if you want."

"It's important," Matt said gently. "Now. What did you feel just before the cup moved toward me?"

"Mad."

"No, no. I mean what did you feel physically or mentally not emotionally."

Abbie's eyebrows were thick. When she knit them, they made a straight line across the top of her nose. "Gosh, Mr. Wright, I cain't —" She looked at him quickly. "I can't find the words to tell about it. It's like I wanted to pick up the nearest thing and throw it at you, and then it was like I had thrown it. Kind of a push from all of me, instead of just my hand."

Matt frowned while he put the cup back on the table. "Try to feel exactly like that again."

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Obediently, Abbie concentrated. Her face worked. Finally she sagged back in her chair. "I cai — I can't. I just don't feel like it."

"You're going back to your father!" Matt snapped.

The cup rocked.

"There!" Matt said quickly. "Try it again before you forget!"

The cup spun around.

"Again!"

The cup rose an inch from the table and settled down.

Abbie sighed. "It *was* just a trick, wasn't it, Mr. Wright? You aren't really going to send me back?"

"No, but maybe you'll wish I had before we're through. You'll have to work and practice until you have full conscious control of whatever it is."

"All right," Abbie said submissively. "But it's terrible tiring work when you don't feel like it."

"Terribly," Matt corrected.

"Terribly," Abbie repeated.

"Now," Matt said. "Try it again."

ABBIE practiced until noon. Her maximum effort was to raise the cup a foot from the table, but that she could do very well.

"Where does the energy come from?" Matt asked.

"I don't know," Abbie sighed, "but I'm powerful hungry."

"Very," Matt said.

"Very hungry," Abbie repeated. She got up and walked to the cupboard. "How many ham sandwiches do you want — two?"

Matt nodded absently. When the sandwiches came, he ate in thoughtful silence.

It was true, then. Abbie could do it, but she had to be unhappy to have full power and control.

"Try it on the mustard," he said.

"I'm so full," Abbie explained contentedly. She had eaten three sandwiches.

Matt stared at the yellow jar, unseeing. It was quite a problem. There was no sure way of determining just what Abbie's powers were, without getting some equipment. He had to find out just what it was she did, and what effect it had on her, before he could expect to fully evaluate any data.

But that wasn't the hardest part of it. He should be able to pick up the things he needed in Springfield. It was what he was going to have to do to Abbie that troubled him.

All he had been able to find out about Abbie's phenomena was that they seemed to occur with the greatest frequency and strength when the girl was unhappy.

Matt stared out through the cabin window.

Gradually, he was forming a

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plan to make Abbie unhappier than she had ever been.

ALL afternoon Matt was very kind to Abbie. He helped her dry the dishes, although she protested vigorously. He talked to her about his life and about his studies at the University of Kansas. He told her about the thesis and how he had to write it to get his master's degree in psychology and what he wanted to do when he was graduated.

"Psychology," he said, "is only an infant science. It isn't really a science at all but a metaphysics. It's a lot of theorizing from insufficient data. The only way you can get data is by experimentation, and you can't experiment because psychology is people, living people. Science is a ruthless business of observation and setting up theories and then knocking them down in laboratories. Physicists can destroy everything from atoms to whole islands; biologists can destroy animals; anatomists can dissect cadavers. But psychologists have no true laboratories; they can't be ruthless because public opinion won't stand for it, and cadavers aren't much good. Psychology will never be a true science until it has its laboratories where it can be just as ruthless as the physical sciences. It has to come."

Matt stopped. Abbie was a good listener; he had forgotten he was talking to a hill girl.

"Tell me more about K.U.," she sighed.

He tried to answer her questions about what the coeds wore when they went to classes and when they had dates and when they went to dances. Her eyes grew large and round.

"Guess it would be romantic," Abbie sighed. "How far do they let a fellow go if they ain't — aren't serious?"

Matt thought Abbie's attempt to improve her English was touching — almost pathetic. He puzzled about her question for a moment. "I guess it depends on the girl."

Abbie nodded understandingly. "Why do they go to college?"

"To get married," Matt said. "Most of them."

Abbie shook her head. "All those pretty clothes. All those men. They must be awful — very slow not to get married quick. Can't they get married at home without waiting so long?"

Matt frowned perplexedly! Abbie had a talent for asking questions which reached down to basic social relationships. "The men they meet at college will make more money for them."

"Oh," Abbie said. She shrugged. "That's all right, I guess, if that's what you want."

So it went. Matt paid Abbie

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little compliments on her appearance, and she blushed and looked pleased. He told her he couldn't understand why she wasn't besieged by suitors and why she hadn't been married long ago. She blushed deeper. He bragged expansively on the supper she cooked and swore that he had never tasted better.

ABBIE couldn't have been happier. She hummed through her tasks. Everything worked well for her. The dishes were done almost as soon as they were started.

Matt walked out on the porch. He sat down on the edge. Abbie settled herself beside him, quietly, not touching him, her hands in her lap.

The cabin was built on the top of a ridge. It was night, but the moon had come up big and yellow, and they could look far out over the valley. Silvery, in a dark green setting of trees, the lake glimmered far below.

"Ain't — isn't it purty," Abbie sighed, folding her hands.

"Pretty," Matt said absently.

"Pretty," Abbie sighed.

They sat in silence. Matt sensed her nearness in a way that was almost physical. It stirred him. There was something intensely feminine about Abbie that was very appealing at times, in spite of her plain face and shapeless clothes and bare feet and lack of education. Even her single-minded ambition was a striving to fulfill her true, her basic function. In a way it was more vital and understandable than all the confused sublimations of the girls he had known.

Abbie, at least, knew what she wanted and what she would pay to get it. She would make someone a good wife. Her one goal would be to make her husband happy. She would cook and clean for him and bear his strong, healthy children with a great and thrilling joy. She would be silent when he was silent, unobtrusive when he was working, merry when he was gay, infinitely responsive when he was passionate. And the transcendent wonder of it was that she would be fulfilling her finest function in doing it; she would be serenely happy, blissfully content.

Matt lit a cigarette in an attempt to break the mood. He glanced at her face by the light of the match. "What is courting like here in the hills?" he asked.

"Sometimes we walk," Abbie said dreamily, "and look at things together, and talk a little. Sometimes there's a dance at the school house. If a fellow has a boat, you can go out on the lake. There's huskin' bees an' church socials an' picnics. But mostly when the moon is a-shinin' an' the night is

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warm, we just sit on a porch an' hold hands and do whatever the girl's willin' to allow."

Matt reached out and took one of her hands and held it in his. It was cool and dry and strong. It clung to his hand.

She turned her face to him, her eyes searching for his face in the darkness. "Do you like me a little bit, Mr. Wright?" she asked softly. "Not marryin'-like, but friendly-like?"

"I think that you're the most feminine girl I've ever met," he said, and realized it was true.

Almost without volition on either part, they seemed to lean together, blending in the night. Matt's lips sought her pale little girl lips and found them, and they weren't pale or little girlish at all, but warm and soft and passionate. Matt felt her lips part. He broke away, breathing quickly.

Abbie half turned to nestle against his shoulder, his arm held tightly around her. She sighed contentedly. "I reckon I wouldn't be unwillin'," she said tremulously, "whatever you wanted to do."

"I can't understand why you didn't get married long ago," he said.

"I guess it was me," Abbie said reflectively. "I wasn't rightly satisfied with any of my fellows. I'd get mad at them for no reason at all, and then something bad would happen to them and pretty soon no one would come courtin'. Maybe I expected them to be what they weren't. I guess I wasn't really in love with any of them. Anyways, I'm glad I didn't get married up." She sighed.

Matt felt the stirrings of something that felt oddly like compunction. *What a louse you are, Matthew Wright!*

"What happened to them — your fellows?" he asked. "Was it something you did?"

"Folks said it was," Abbie said. There was a trace of bitterness in her voice. "They said I had the evil eye. I don't see how. There isn't anything wrong with my eyes, is there?" She looked up at him; her eyes were large and dark blue, with little flecks of silvery moonlight in them.

"Not a thing," Matt said. "They're very beautiful."

"I don't see how it could have been any of my fault," Abbie said. "Of course, when Hank was late that evening, I told him he was so slow he might as well have a broken leg. Right after that he was nailing shingles on a roof, and he fell off and broke his leg. But I reckon he'd have broke it anyways. He was always right careless.

"And then Gene, he was so cold I told him he should fall in the lake and warm up. But a person

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who does a lot of fishin', I guess he falls in a lot anyways."

"I guess so," Matt said. He began to shiver.

"You're shivering, Mr. Wright," Abbie said solicitously. "Let me go get your jacket."

"Never mind," Matt said. "It's about time for bed anyway. You go in and get ready. Tomorrow — tomorrow we're going to drive to Springfield for some shopping."

"Really, Mr. Wright? I haven't never been to Springfield," Abbie said incredulously. She got up, her eyes shining. "Really?"

"Really," Matt said. "Go on in, now."

She went in. She was almost dancing.

Matt sat on the porch for a few minutes longer, thinking. It was funny what happened to the fellows that disappointed Abbie. When he lit a cigarette, his hand was shaking.

Abbie had a way of being many different persons. Already Matt had known four of them: the moody little girl with braids down her back shuffling along a dusty road or bouncing gleefully on a car seat; the happy, placid housewife with cheeks rosy from the stove; the unhappy vessel of strange powers, tearful and reluctant; the girl with the passionate lips in the moon-streaked darkness. Which one was Abbie, the true Abbie?

THE next morning Matt had a fifth Abbie to consider. Her face was scrubbed and shining until it almost rivaled her eyes. Her braided hair was wound in a coronet around her head. She was wearing a different dress made of a shiny blue quilted material with a red lining. Matt scanned his small knowledge of dress materials. Taffeta? The color did terrible things to her hair. The dress had a V-shape neck and back and fitted better than anything she had worn yet. On one hip was a large artificial rose. Her stockingless feet were enclosed in a pair of black, patent-leather sandals.

My God! Matt thought. *Her Sunday best! I'll have to walk with that down the streets of Springfield.* He shuddered, and resisted the impulse to tear off that horrible rose.

"Well," he said, "all ready?"

Abbie blushed excitedly. "Are we really going to Springfield, Mr. Wright?"

"We are if the car will start."

"Oh, it'll start," Abbie said confidently.

Matt gave her a thoughtful sidelong glance. That was another thing.

After the usual hearty breakfast, with fried potatoes on the side, they got into the car. The brakes released without hesitation.

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The drive was more than fifty miles, half of it over dirt roads that were roller-coaster washboards, and they drove it in silence. Every few miles Matt would glance at Abbie out of the corner of his eye and shudder. As excited as she was, like a child, Abbie was contented to sit quietly and enjoy the ride, particularly when they swung off the dirt road onto Highway 665.

When they came into Springfield, Abbie's face was glowing. She stared at the buildings as if they had sprung magically into being especially for her. Then she began to inspect the people walking along the streets. Matt noticed that it was the women who received her closest attention.

Suddenly Matt noticed that Abbie was very quiet. He glanced toward her. She was still, staring down at her hands resting in her lap.

"What's the matter?" Matt asked.

"I guess," she said, her voice a little unsteady, "I guess I look pretty funny. I guess you'll feel ashamed having me along. If it's all right with you, Mr. Wright, I'll just sit in the car."

"Nonsense," Matt said heartily. "You look fine." *The little devil,* he thought. *She has an uncanny talent for understanding things. She's either unusually perceptive or — What?* "Besides, I'll need you to try on some clothes."

"Clothes, Mr. Wright!" she exclaimed. She seemed to find it hard to speak. "You're going to buy some clothes."

Matt nodded. He parked the car in front of Springfield's biggest department store. He came around to Abbie's door and helped her out. For a moment Abbie's face was level with his; her blue eyes locked with his dark ones in a look that Matt refused to analyze. They walked into the store, Abbie clinging to his arm. He could feel her heart beating swiftly. Matt stopped a moment to study the directory.

"Second floor," he said.

Abbie held back as Matt started off. "Kin we — can we look around here — for just a second?" Abbie asked hesitantly.

Matt glanced at her and shrugged. "I suppose so."

ABBIE started off determinedly toward some mysterious, unseen destination, leading Matt down innumerable aisles. All the way to the back of the store they went, and emerged miraculously into the kitchenware department. Abbie stopped on the threshhold, gazing rapturously at the gleaming pots and pans, beaters, knives, and gadgets, as if they were jewels. She dismissed with a glance the stoves and electrical

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appliances, but the cooking utensils brought forth long sighs. After a moment she moved among them, staring at them, touching them with one timid finger. She made little crooning sounds deep in her throat.

Matt had to drag her away.

They were almost to the stairs when Matt noticed that she was holding something to her breast. He stopped. He stared aghast. She was hugging a tiny frying pan of shiny aluminum and dully gleaming copper.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded.

"Back there," she said innocently. "They got so many. They'll never miss a little thing like this."

"But you can't do that!" Matt said. "That's stealing."

" 'Tain't stealing when they got so much and I got so little," she explained.

"You've got to take it back!" Matt made a futile grab for the frying pan. Abbie hugged it to her breast with both arms.

"Don't take it away from me!" she wailed. "Please don't make me take it back!"

Matt glanced around nervously. So far no one seemed to be watching them. He turned back to Abbie. "Sh-h-h!" he said. "Be quiet now. Please be quiet." He looked at her pleadingly. She hugged the frying pan tighter. "All right," he sighed. "Stay here! Don't move! Don't say anything!"

QUICKLY he walked back to kitchenwares. He caught the attention of the clerk. "How much are those," he said, pointing to the frying pans.

"Four-fifty, sir. Shall I wrap one up?"

"Four-fifty!"

"Yes, sir," the man said. "We have some cheaper ones in all aluminum —"

"Never mind," Matt said hurriedly. He pulled out his billfold. "Here. Give me a receipt and a sack."

The clerk picked up a frying pan.

"No, no," Matt said. "I don't want one. I just want a receipt and a sack."

"But, sir," the man said bewilderedly. "You said —"

"Don't argue with me," Matt said. "Just give me a receipt and a sack!"

The clerk rang up the sale, tore off the receipt, dropped it in a sack, and handed it to Matt with a very dazed expression on his face.

"Anything else, sir?" he asked automatically.

"I hope not," said Matt, and hurried away. When he looked back the clerk was still staring after him.

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ABBIE was standing by the stairs where he had left her.

"Put the frying pan in here," he whispered.

She gave him a look of admiration. "Oh, that was real clever of you."

Matt mopped his forehead. "Yes, wasn't it." He took her arm and hurried her up the stairs. At the top Matt came to a halt and looked around. Abbie stared with big eyes at the racks upon racks of dresses.

"I never knew," she whispered, "there was so many dresses in the world."

Matt nodded absently. He had to get away long enough to find a laboratory from which to rent some testing apparatus.

He saw a saleswoman, and drew her aside.

"The girl over there," he said. "I want you to take her to the beauty parlor and give her the works. Haircut, shampoo, setting, facial, eyebrows thinned and shaped and a makeup job. Then get her a new outfit from the skin out. Can you do all that?"

The saleswoman looked quite pleased. "We'll be very happy to help you."

Matt took out his billfold and peered into it. Slowly he extracted one traveler's check for one hundred dollars and then another. It left him only three hundred dollars, and he still had to get the equipment and live for the rest of the summer. Matt sighed and countersigned the checks. "Try to keep it under this," he said heavily. "If you can."

"Yes, sir," said the saleswoman and hesitated, smiling. "Your fiancée?"

"Good God, no," Matt blurted out. "I mean — she's my — niece. It's her birthday."

He walked over to Abbie, breathing heavily. "Go with this woman, Abbie, and do what she tells you."

"Yes, Mr. Wright," Abbie said dazedly. And she walked away as if she were entering into fairyland.

Matt turned, biting his lip. He felt slightly sick.

HE had one more thing to do before he could leave the store. Making sure Abbie was gone, he went into the lingerie department. He regretted it almost immediately. Once he had seen a woman come into a pool hall; he must, he thought, wear the same sheepish, out-of-place expression.

He swallowed his qualms — they were a hard lump in his throat — and walked up to the counter.

"Yes, sir," said the young woman brightly, "what can I do for you?"

Matt avoided looking at her.

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"I'd like to buy a negligee," he said in a low voice.

"What size?"

Matt began a motion with his hands and then dropped them hastily at his sides. "About five feet tall. Slim."

The woman led him along the counter. "Any particular color?"

"Uh — black," Matt said hoarsely.

The clerk brought out a garment that was very black, very lacy, very sheer. "This is thirty-nine ninety-eight."

Matt stared at it. "That's awfully black," he said.

"We have some others," the clerk began, folding the negligee.

"Never mind," Matt said quickly. "Wrap it up." Furtively, he slipped the money over the counter.

When he came out, the package under his arm, he was sweating freely.

He put the box in his car and looked at his watch. He had about two and a half hours, at least. He should be able to find everything he needed in that time.

He pulled a list of things out of his pocket, and found a telephone directory in a drugstore.

SPRINGFIELD had a laboratory supply house. He called the number, asked for the equipment he'd need, was told they had it for rent, and drove over to pick it up. The rental didn't seem like much by the day, but it was, he discovered on figuring it out, a lot by the month — enough to break him fast if he didn't get something like a controlled series of tests, very fast.

Feeling like a child-slayer, he drove back to the department store and parked.

Only one hour had gone by. He went into the store and browsed about.

Two hours. He put another nickel in the parking meter. He sat down in a red leather chair and tried to look as if he were testing it for size and comfort.

Three hours. He fed the parking meter again, and began to feel hungry. He went back to the chair. From it, he could keep an eye on the stairs.

Women went up and came down. None of them were Abbie. He wondered, with a flash of fear, if she had been caught trying to make off with something else.

Matt tried not watching the stairs on the theory that a watched pot never boils. Never again, he vowed, would he go shopping with a woman. Where the devil was Abbie?

"Mr. Wright." The voice was tremulous and low.

Matt looked up and leaped out of his chair. The girl standing beside him was blond and breathtaking. The hair was short and

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fluffed out at the ends; it framed a beautiful face. A soft, simple black dress with a low neckline clung to a small but womanly figure. Slim, long legs in sheer stockings and small black shoes with towering heels.

"Good God, Abbie! What have they done to you?"

"Don't you like it?" Abbie asked. The lovely face clouded up.

"It's — it's marvelous," Matt spluttered. "But they bleached your hair!"

Abbie beamed. "The woman who worked on it called it a rinse. She said it was natural, but I should wash it every few days. Not with laundry soap, either." She sighed. "I didn't know there was so much a girl could do to her face. I've got so much to learn. Why, she —"

Abbie prattled on happily while Matt stared at her, incredulous. Had he been sleeping in the same small cabin with this girl? Had she been cooking his meals and darning the holes in his pockets? Had he really kissed her and held her in his arms and heard her say, "I reckon I wouldn't be unwillin' —"

He wondered if he would act the same again.

MATT had expected a difference but not such a startling one. She wore her clothes with a becoming sureness. She walked on the high heels as if she had worn them all her life. She carried herself as if she was born to beauty. But then, things always worked well for Abbie.

Abbie opened a small black purse and took out five dollars and twenty-one cents. "The woman said I should give this back to you."

Matt took it and looked at it in his hand and back at Abbie. He shrugged and smiled. "The power of money. Have you got everything?"

Under her arm she carried a large package that contained, no doubt, the clothes and shoes she had worn. Matt took it from her. She refused to give up the package that held the frying pan.

"I couldn't wear this," she said. She reached into her purse and pulled out something black and filmy. She held it up by one strap. "It was uncomfortable."

Matt shot nervous glances to the right and the left. "Put it away." He crammed it back into the purse and snapped the purse shut. "Are you hungry?"

"I could eat a hog," Abbie said.

Coming from this blonde creature, the incongruity set Matt to laughing. Abbie stared with wide eyes. "Did I say something wrong?" she asked plaintively.

"No." Matt got out and led her toward the door.

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"You got to tell me," Abbie said appealingly. "There's so much I don't know."

Matt located the most expensive restaurant in town. It had a romantic atmosphere but he had chosen it because it specialized in sea food. He wanted to be sure that Abbie had things to eat she had never tasted before.

Matt ordered for both of them: shrimp cocktail, assorted relishes, chef's salad with roquefort dressing, broiled lobster tails with drawn butter, french fried potatoes, broccoli with a cheese sauce, frozen eclair, coffee. The food was good, and Abbie ate everything with great wonderment, as if it were about to disappear into the mysterious place from which it came.

She stared wide-eyed at the room and its decorations and the other diners and the waiter, and seemed oblivious of the fact that other men were staring admiringly at her. The waiter puzzled her. "Is this all he does?" she asked timidly. Matt nodded. "He's very good at it," Abbie conceded.

"Try to move the coffee cup," Matt said when they finished.

Abbie stared at it for a moment. "I can't," she said softly. "I tried awful — very hard, but I can't. I'd do anything you wanted, Mr. Wright, but I can't do that."

Matt smiled. "That's all right. I just wanted to see if you could."

MATT found a place they could dance. He ordered a couple of drinks. Abbie sipped hers once, made a face, and wouldn't touch it again.

She danced lightly and gracefully in her high-heeled shoes. They brought the top of her head level with his lips. She rested her head blissfully against his shoulder and pressed herself very close. For a moment Matt relaxed and let himself enjoy the pleasures of the aftermath of a good meal and a beautiful girl in his arms. But Abbie seemed to be in a private Eden of her own, as if she had entered a paradise and was afraid to speak for fear the spell would break.

During the long drive home, she spoke only once. "Do people live like that all the time?"

"No," Matt said. "Not always. Not unless they have a lot of money."

Abbie nodded. "That's the way it should be," she said softly. "It should only happen a long ways apart."

When they reached the cabin, Matt reached into the back seat for the package he had bought.

"What's that?" Abbie asked.

"Open it," Matt said.

She held it up a little, lacy and black in the moonlight. Then she turned to look at Matt, her face transparent, her eyes glowing. "Wait out here a minute, will

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you?" she asked breathlessly.

"All right." Matt lit a cigarette and stood on the porch looking out over the valley, hating himself.

After a few minutes, he heard a little whisper. "Come in, Mr. Wright."

HE opened the door started in and stopped, stunned. One kerosene lamp lit the room dimly. The new clothes were draped carefully over the edge of a chair. Abbie was wearing the negligee. That was all. Through its lacy blackness she gleamed pink and white, a lovely vision of seductiveness. She stood by the table, staring at the floor. When she looked up, her cheeks were flushed.

Suddenly she ran lightly across the floor and threw her arms around Matt's neck and kissed him hard on the lips. Her lips moved. She drew back a little, looking up at him.

"There's only one way a girl like me can thank a man for a day as wonderful as this," she whispered. "For the clothes and the trip and the dinner and the dancing. And for being so nice. I never thought anything like this would ever happen to me. I don't mind. I guess it isn't bad when you really like someone. I like you awful — very well. I'm glad they made me pretty. If I can make you happy — just for a moment —"

Gently, feeling sick, Matt took her hands from around his neck. "You don't understand," he said coldly. "I've done a terrible thing. I don't know how you can ever forgive me. Somehow you misunderstood me. Those clothes, the negligee — they're for another girl — the girl I'm going to marry — my fiancée. You're about her size and I thought — I don't know how I could have misled . . ."

He stopped. It was enough. His plan had worked. Abbie had crumpled. Slowly, as he spoke, the life had drained out of her, the glow had fled from her face, and she seemed to shrink in upon herself, cold and broken. She was a little girl, slapped across the face in her most spiritual moment by the one person she had trusted most.

"That's all right," she said faintly. "Thanks for letting me think they was mine — that it was for me — only for a little. I'll never forget."

She turned and went to the bunk and let the blanket fall back around her.

It was the sobbing that kept Matt from going to sleep that night. Or maybe it was the way the sobs were so soft and muffled that he had to strain to hear them.

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BREAKFAST was a miserable meal. There was something wrong with the food, although Matt couldn't quite pin down what it was. Everything was cooked just the same, but the flavor was gone. Matt cut and chewed mechanically and tried to avoid looking at Abbie. It wasn't difficult; she seemed very small today, and she kept her eyes on the floor.

She was dressed in the shapeless blue gingham once more. She toyed listlessly with her food. Her face was scrubbed free of makeup, and everything about her was dull. Even her newly blonde hair had faded.

Several times Matt opened his mouth to apologize again, and shut it without saying anything. Finally he cleared his throat and said, "Where's your new frying pan?"

She looked up for the first time. Her blue eyes were cloudy. "I put it away," she said lifelessly, "do you want it back?"

"No, no," Matt said hurriedly. "I was just asking."

Silence fell again, like a sodden blanket. Matt sat and chain-smoked while Abbie cleaned up the table and washed the dishes.

When she finished she turned around with her back to the dishpan. "Do you want me to move things for you? I can do it real good today."

Matt saw the little pile of packages in the corner and noticed for the first time that the new clothes were gone. He steeled himself. "How do you know?"

"I got a feeling."

"Do you mind?"

"I don't mind. I don't mind anything." She came forward and sat down in the chair. "Look!"

The table between them lifted, twisted, tilted on one leg, and crashed on its side to the floor.

"How did you feel?" Matt said excitedly. "Can you control the power? Was the movement accidental?"

"It felt like it was kind of a part of me," Abbie said. "Like my hand. But I didn't know exactly what it was going to do."

"Wait a minute," Matt said. "I'm going to get some things out of the car. Maybe we can learn a little more about what makes you able to do things like this. You don't mind, do you?"

"What's the good of it?" she asked listlessly.

Matt dashed out to the car and pulled the two cartons of equipment out of the trunk. He carried them into the shack and laid the apparatus out on the table. He went back to the car and brought in the bathroom scales he'd bought in the drugstore in Springfield.

"All right, Abbie. First, let's find out a few things about you

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before we try moving anything else."

Abbie complied automatically while he took her temperature and pulse, measured her blood pressure and weighed her. "I wish I could set up controls to measure your basal metabolism," he muttered as he worked, "but this will have to do. I wish this shack had a generator."

"I could get you electricity," Abbie said without much interest.

"Hmmm — you could at that, I guess. But that would make these tests meaningless, if you had to devote energy to keeping the equipment running."

HE cursed the limited knowledge that was undoubtedly making him miss things that a man who had studied longer would have know more about.

But there wasn't anything he could do about that. Once he'd reached some preliminary conclusions, more experienced researchers could take over the job.

Working carefully, he wrote down the results.

"Now, Abbie, would you please pick that chair up off the floor, and hold it up for a few minutes? No — I mean really go over and pick it up."

He let her hold it for exactly five minutes, then ran her through the same tests as before, noting the changes in temperature, blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration, and then he weighed her again.

"All right. Take a rest now. We'll have to wait until these readings drop down to what they were before we do anything else," Matt said.

Still not displaying anything more than acquiescence, Abbie sat down in another chair and stared at the floor.

"Abbie, do you mind helping me?" Matt asked. "It's for your benefit, too. If you can control these powers all the time, maybe the fellows around here will stop breaking legs and falling into lakes."

Abbie's dull expression did not change. "I don't care," she said.

Matt sighed. For a moment, he considered dropping his experiments and just getting out of Abbie's life — packing his thesis notes and typewriter in the car and driving back to the University. But he couldn't stop now. He was too close to the beginnings of an answer.

He checked Abbie again, and found that his readings coincided with the first set. The short rest had dropped her heartbeat and respiration back to normal.

"Let's try all over again," Matt said. "Lift that chair to the same height you were holding it, please."

The chair jerked upward, hesitantly. "Easy. Just a little more."

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It straightened, then moved more steadily. "Hold it there." The chair hovered motionless in the air, maintaining its position. Matt waited five minutes. "All right. Let it down now, easy. Slow." The chair settled gently to the floor, like a drifting feather.

Once more, he checked Abbie. Her heartbeat was below what it had been. Her blood pressure was lower. Her respiration was shallow — her breast was barely rising to each breath. Her temperature was low — dangerously so, for an ordinary human being.

"How do you feel?" he asked apprehensively. If this was what always happened, then Abbie was in real danger every time she used her powers.

"All right," she said with no more than her previous disinterest. Matt frowned, but she was showing no signs of discomfort.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "You want me to try some more?"

"If you're sure you're not in danger. But I want you to stop if you feel any pain or if you're uncomfortable. Now, lift the table just this far . . ."

THEY practiced with the table for an hour. At the end of that time, Abbie had it under perfect control. She could raise it a fraction of an inch or rocket it to the ceiling where it would remain, legs pointing stiffly toward the floor, until she lowered it. She balanced it on one leg and set it spinning like a top.

Distance did not seem to diminish Abbie's control or power. She could make the table perform equally well from any point in the room, from outside the cabin, or from a point to which she shuffled dispiritedly several hundred yards down the road.

"How do you know where it is and what it's doing?" Matt asked frowning.

Abbie shrugged listlessly. "I just feel it."

"With what?" Matt asked. "Do you see it? Feel it? Sense it? If we could isolate the sense —"

"It's all of those," Abbie said.

Matt shook his head in frustration. "You look a little tired. You'd better lie down."

She lay in her bunk, not moving, her face turned to the wall, but Matt knew that she wasn't asleep. When she didn't get up to fix lunch, Matt opened a can of soup and tried to get her to eat some of it.

"No, thanks, Mr. Wright," Abbie said. "I ain't hungry."

"I'm not hungry," Matt corrected.

Abbie didn't respond. In the evening she got out of her bunk to fix supper, but she didn't eat more than a few mouthfuls. After she washed the dishes, she went

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back into her bunk and pulled the blanket around it.

Matt sat up, trying to make sense out of his charts. Despite their readings, Abbie hadn't reacted dangerously to what should have been frightening physiological changes. He could be fairly safe in assuming that they always accompanied the appearance of her parapsychological powers — and she had certainly lived through those well enough.

But why was there such a difference in the way she reacted when she was happy and when she wasn't? The first morning, when she had barely been able to assume conscious control, she'd been ravenously hungry. Today, when she had performed feats that made the others insignificant she was neither hungry nor abnormally exhausted. She was tired, yes, but there *had* been a measurable, though slight, expenditure of energy with each action, which, accumulated through their numerous experiments, could be expected to equal that required for an afternoon's normal work.

What was different? Why, when she tried with what amounted to will-power alone, was it harder for her to move an object telekinetically than it would have been to do so physically? Why was the reverse true when she was unhappy?

Unless she was tapping a source of energy somewhere.

The thought sounded as though there might be something behind it. He reached for a blank sheet of paper and began jotting down ideas.

Disregarding the first morning's experiments, when she was obviously succeeding despite this hypothetical force, what source of energy could she be contacting?

Well, what physical laws was she violating? Gravity? Inertia?

WHEN Abbie was unhappy, she could nullify gravity — no, not exactly gravity — mass. Once she had done that, a process that might not require much energy at all, the object rose by itself, and, having no mass, could be pushed around easily. Somehow, by some unconscious mechanism, she could restore measured amounts of mass and — there was an idea trying to come to the surface of his thinking — of course! The energy created by the moving or falling body when mass was restored and gravity re-asserted itself was channeled into her body. She stopped being a chemical engine sustained by food burned in the presence of oxygen, and became a receiver for the power generated by the moving bodies.

Writing quickly, he systemat-

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ized what he had learned. Obviously, the energy restored when the manipulated objects fell or swooped back into place couldn't quite balance the energy required to move them. She did get tired—but nowhere near as tired as she should have been. If she empathized with her feelings at such times, she retained a bare margin of control even when happy, but she lost the delicate ability to tap the energy thus liberated, and had to draw on her own body for the power.

Matt grimaced. If that was true—and his charts and graph confirmed it, then she could never use her powers unless she was miserable.

And the key to that lay buried in the childhood of a little hill girl, who probably had been scolded and beaten, as hill children were when they were bad. In this case 'bad' meaning a little girl who could move things without touching them, who had been confronted with the example of 'Libby,' the perfect little girl who would always have minded her mother, until she had come to associate the use of her powers only with unhappiness, with not being wanted, with rejection on the part of the people whom she loved.

Matt winced. *You louse, Wright!*

But it was too late to do anything about it now. He had to go on with what he was doing.

ABBIE'S appetite wasn't any better in the morning. She looked tired, too, as if she hadn't slept. Matt stared at her for a moment thoughtfully, then shrugged and put her to work.

In a few minutes, Abbie could duplicate her feats with the table of the day before with a control that was, if anything, even finer. Matt extended his experiment to her subjective reactions.

"Let's isolate the source," he said. "Relax. Try to do it with the mind alone. Will the table to move."

Matt jotted down notes. At the end of half an hour he had the following results:

Mind alone—negative.

Body alone—negative.

Emotions alone—negative.

It was crude and uncertain. It would take days or months of practice to be able to use the mind without a sympathetic tension of the body, or to stop thinking or to wall off an emotion. But Matt was fairly sure that the telekinetic ability was a complex of all three and perhaps some others that he had no way of knowing about, which Abbie couldn't describe. But if any of the primary three were inhibited, consciously or unconsciously, Abbie could not move a crumb of bread.

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Two of them could be controlled. The third was a product of environment and circumstances. Abbie had to be unhappy.

A muscle twitched in Matt's jaw, and he told Abbie to try moving more than one object. He saw a cup of coffee rise in the air, turn a double somersault without spilling a drop, and sit down gently in the saucer that climbed to meet it. Matt stood up, picked the cup out of the air, drank the coffee, and put the cup back. The saucer did not wobble.

There were limits to Abbie's ability. The number of dissimilar objects she could manipulate seemed to be three, regardless of size; she could handle five similar objects with ease, and she had made six slices of bread do an intricate dance in the air. It was possible, of course, that she might improve with practice.

"My God!" Matt exclaimed. "You could make a fortune as a magician."

"Could I?" Abbie said without interest. She pleaded a headache and went to bed. Matt said nothing. They had worked for an hour and a half.

Matt lit a cigarette. The latent telekinetic power could explain a lot of things, poltergeist phenomena, for instance, and in a more conscious form, levitation and the Indian rope trick and the whole gamut of oriental mysticism.

He spent the rest of the day making careful notes of everything Abbie did, the date and time, the object and its approximate weight and its movements. When he finished, he would have a complete case history. Complete except for the vital parts which he did not dare put down on paper.

Several times he turned to stare at Abbie's still, small form. He was only beginning to realize the tremendous potentialities locked up within her. His awareness had an edge of fear. What role was it he'd chosen for himself. He had been fairy godmother, but that no longer. Pygmalion? He felt a little like Pandora must have felt before she opened the box. Or, perhaps, he thought ruefully, he was more like Doctor Frankenstein.

ABBIE did not get up at all that day, and she refused to eat anything Matt fixed. Next morning, when she climbed slowly from her bunk, his apprehension sharpened.

She was gaunt, and her face had a middle-aged, haggard look. Her blond hair was dull and lifeless. Matt had already cooked breakfast, but she only went through the motions of eating. He urged her, but she put her fork down tiredly.

"It don't matter," she said.

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"Maybe you're sick," Matt fretted. "We'll take you to a doctor."

Abbie looked at Matt levelly and shook her head. "What's wrong with me, a doctor won't fix."

That was the morning Matt saw a can of baking powder pass through his chest. Abbie had been tossing it to Matt at various speeds, gauging the strength of the push necessary. Matt would either catch it or Abbie would stop it short and bring it back to her. But this time it came too fast, bullet-like. Involuntarily, Matt looked down, tensing his body for the impact.

He saw the can go in . . .

Abbie's eyes were wide and frightened. Matt turned around dazedly, prodding his chest with trembling fingers. The can had shattered against the cabin wall behind him. It lay on the floor, battered, in a drift of powder.

"It went in," Matt said. "I saw it, but I didn't feel a thing. It passed right through me. What happened, Abbie?"

"I couldn't stop it," she whispered, "so I just sort of wished it wasn't there. For just a moment. And it wasn't."

That was how they found out that Abbie could teleport. It was as simple as telekinesis. She could project or pull objects through walls without hurting either one. Little things, big things. It made no difference. Distance made no difference either, apparently.

"What about living things?" Matt asked.

Abbie concentrated. Suddenly there was a mouse on the table, a brown field mouse with twitching whiskers and large, startled black eyes. For a moment it crouched there, frozen, and then it scampered for the edge of the table, straight toward Abbie.

Abbie screamed and reacted. Twisting in the air, the mouse vanished. Matt looked up, his mouth hanging open. Abbie was three feet in the air, hovering like a hummingbird. Slowly she sank down to her chair.

"It works on people, too," Matt whispered. "Try it again. Try it on me."

MATT felt nauseated, as if he had suddenly stepped off the Earth. The room shifted around him. He looked down. He was floating in the air about two feet above the chair he had been sitting on. He was turning slowly, so that the room seemed to revolve around him.

He looked for Abbie, but she was behind him now. Slowly she drifted into view. "That's fine," he said. Abbie looked happier than she had looked for days. She almost smiled.

Matt began to turn more rapid-

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ly. In a moment he was spinning like a top; the room flashed into a kaleidoscope. He swallowed hard. "All right," he shouted, "that's enough."

Abruptly he stopped spinning and dropped. His stomach soared up into his throat. He thumped solidly into the chair and immediately hopped up with a howl of anguish. He rubbed himself with both hands.

"Ouch!" he shouted. And then accusingly, "You did that on purpose."

Abbie looked innocent. "I done what you said."

"All right, you did," Matt said bitterly. "From now on, I resign as a guinea pig."

Abbie folded her hands in her lap. "What shall I do?

"Practice on yourself," Matt said.

"Yes, Mr. Wright." She rose sedately in the air. "This is wonderful." She stretched out as if she were laying in bed. She floated around the room. Matt was reminded of shows in which he had seen magicians producing the same illusion, passing hoops cleverly around their assistant's body to show that there were no wires. Only this wasn't magic; this wasn't illusion; this was real.

Abbie settled back into the chair. Her face was glowing. "I feel like I could do anything," she said. "Now what shall I try."

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Matt thought a moment. "Can you project yourself?"

"Where to?"

"Oh, anywhere," Matt said impatiently. "It doesn't matter."

"Anywhere?" she repeated. There was a distant and unreadable expression in her eyes.

And then she vanished.

Matt stared at the chair she had been in. She was gone, indisputably gone. He searched the room, a simple process. There was no sign of her. He went outside. The afternoon sun beat down, exposing everything in a harsh light.

"Abbie!" Matt shouted. "Abbie!" He waited. He heard only the echo drifting back from the hills across the lake. For five minutes he roamed about the cabin, shouting and calling, before he gave up.

He went back into the cabin. He sat down and stared moodily at the bunk where Abbie had slept. Where was she now? Was she trapped in some extra dimension, weird and inexplicable to

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the senses, within which her power could not work.

There had to be some such explanation for teleportation — a fourth dimensional shortcut across our three. Why not—if she could nullify mass, she could adjust atoms so that they entered one of the other dimensions.

AS he brooded, remorse came to him slowly, creeping in so stealthily that awareness of it was like a blow. The whole scheme had been madness. He could not understand now the insane ambition that had led to this tinkering with human lives and the structure of the Universe. He had justified it to himself with the name of science. But the word had no mystic power of absolution.

His motive had been something entirely different. It was only a sublimated lust for power, and thinly disguised at that. The power, of knowledge. And for that lust, which she could never understand, an innocent, unsophisticated girl had suffered.

Was Abbie dead? Perhaps that was the most merciful thing.

Ends can never justify means, Matt realized now. They are too inextricably intertwined ever to be separated. The means inevitably shape the ends. In the long view, there are neither means nor ends, for the means are only an infinite series of ends, and the ends are an infinite series of means . . .

And Abbie appeared. Like an Arabian genie, with gifts upon a tray, streaming a mouth-watering incense through the air. Full-formed, she sprang into being, her cheeks glowing, her eyes shining.

"Abbie!" Matt shouted joyfully. His heart gave a sharp bound, as if it had suddenly been released from an unbearable weight. "Where have you been?"

"Springfield."

"Springfield!" Matt gasped. "But that's over fifty miles."

Abbie lowered the tray to the table. She snapped her fingers. "Like that, I was there."

Matt's eyes fell to the tray. It was loaded with cooked food: shrimp cocktail, broiled lobster tails, french fried . . .

Abbie smiled. "I got hungry."

"But where—?" Matt began. "You went back to the restaurant," he said accusingly, "you took the food from there."

Abbie nodded happily. "I was hungry."

"But that's stealing," Matt moaned. And he realized for the first time the enormity of the thing he had done, what he had let loose upon the world. Nothing was safe. Neither money nor jewels nor deadly secrets. Nothing at all.

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"They won't ever miss it," Abbie said, "and nobody saw me." She said it simply, as the ultimate justification.

Matt was swept by the staggering realization that where her basic drives were concerned Abbie was completely unmoral. There was only one small hope. If he could keep her from realizing her civilization-shattering potentialities! They might never occur to her.

"Sure," Matt said. "Sure."

Abbie ate heartily, but Matt had no appetite. He sat thoughtfully, watching her eat, and he experienced a brief thankfulness that at least she wasn't going to starve to death.

"Didn't you have any trouble?" he asked. "Getting the food without anyone seeing you?"

Abbie nodded. "I couldn't decide how to get into the kitchen. I could see that the cook was all alone . . ."

"You could see?"

"I was outside, but I could see into the kitchen, somehow. So finally, I called 'Albert!' And the cook went out and I went in and took the food that was sitting on the tray and came back here. It was really simple, because the cook was expecting someone to call him."

"How did you know that?"

"I thought it," Abbie said, frowning. "Like this."

SHE concentrated for a moment. He watched her, puzzled, and then knew what she meant. Panic caught him by the throat. There were things she shouldn't know. Because he was trying so hard to bury them deep, they scuttled across his consciousness.

Telepathy!

And as he watched her face, he knew that he was right.

Her eyes grew wide and incredulous. Slowly, something hard and cruelly cold slipped over her face like a mask.

Oh, Abbie! My sweet, gentle Abbie!

"You—" she gasped. "You devil! There ain't nothin' too bad for anyone who'd do that!"

I'm a dead man, Matt thought.

"You with your kindness and your handsome face and your city manners," Abbie said pitifully. "How could you do it? You made me fall in love with you. It wasn't hard, was it? All you had to do was hold a little hill girl's hand in the moonlight an' kiss her once, an' she was ready to jump into bed with you. But you didn't want anything as natural as that. All the time you was laughing and scheming. Poor little hill girl!

"You make me think you like me so well you want me to look real purty in new clothes and new hair and a new face. But it's just a trick. All the time it's a trick.

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When I'm feeling happiest and most grateful, you take it all away. I'd sooner you hit me across the face. Poor little hill girl! Thinking you wanted her. Thinking maybe you were aiming to marry her. I wanted to die. Even Paw was never that mean. He never done anything a-purpose, like you."

White-faced, Matt watched her, his mind racing.

"You're thinking you can get around me somehow," Abbie said, "and I'll forget. You can make me think it was all a mistake. 'Tain't no use. You can't, not ever, because I know what you're thinking."

What *had* he been thinking? Had he actually thought of marrying her? Just for a second? He shuddered. It would be hell. Imagine, if you can, a wife who is all-knowing, all-powerful, who can never be evaded, avoided, sighed to, lied to, shut out, shut up. Imagine a wife who can make a room a shambles in a second, who can throw dishes and chairs and tables with equal facility and deadly accuracy. Imagine a wife who can be any place, any time, in the flicker of a suspicion. Imagine a wife who can see through walls and read minds and maybe wish you a raging headache or a broken leg or aching joints.

It would be worse than hell. The torments of the damned would be pleasant compared to that.

Abbie's chin came up. "You don't need to worry. I'd as soon marry up with a rattlesnake. At least he gives you warning before he strikes."

"Kill me!" Matt said desperately. "Go ahead and kill me!"

Abbie smiled sweetly. "Killing's too good for you. I don't know anything that ain't too good for you. But don't worry, I'll think of something. Now, go away and leave me alone."

THANKFULLY, Matt started to turn. Before he could complete it, he found himself outside the cabin. He blinked in the light of the sinking sun. He began to shiver. After a little he sat down on the porch and lit a cigarette. There had to be some way out of this. There was always a way.

From inside the cabin came the sound of running water. *Running water!* Matt resisted an impulse to get up and investigate the mystery. "Leave me alone," Abbie had said, in a tone that Matt didn't care to challenge.

A few minutes later he heard the sound of splashing and Abbie's voice lifted in a sweet soprano. Although he couldn't understand the words, the tune sent chills down his back. And then a phrase came clear:

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Root-a-toot-toot
Three times she did shoot
Right through that hardwood door.
He was her man,
But he done her wrong . . .

Matt began to shake. He passed a trembling hand across his sweaty forehead and wondered if he had a fever. He tried to pull himself together for he had to think clearly. The situation was obvious. He had done a fiendishly cruel thing—no matter what the excuse—and he had been caught and the power of revenge was in the hands of the one he had wronged, never more completely.

The only question was: what form would the revenge take? When he knew that, he might be able to figure out a way to evade it. There was no question in his mind about waiting meekly for justice to strike.

The insurmountable difficulty was that the moment he thought of a plan, it would be unworkable because Abbie would be forewarned. And she was already armed. He had to stop thinking.

How do you stop thinking? he thought miserably. *Stop thinking!* he told himself. *Stop thinking, damn you!*

He might be on the brink of the perfect solution. But if he thought of it, it would be worthless. And if he couldn't think of it, then—

The circle was complete. He was back where he started, staring at its perfect viciousness. There was only one possi—

Mary had a little lamb with fleece as white as snow and everywhere that Mary went (Relax!) *the lamb* (Don't think!) *was sure* (Act on the spur of the moment) *to go. Mary had a . . .*

"Well, Mr. Wright, are you ready to go?"

Matt started. Beside him were a pair of black suede shoes filled with small feet. His gaze traveled up the lovely, nylon-sheathed legs, up the clinging black dress that swelled so provocatively, to the face with its blue eyes and red lips and blond hair.

Even in his pressing predicament, Matt had to recognize the impact of her beauty. It was a pity that her other gifts were too terrible.

"I reckon your fiancée won't mind," Abbie said sweetly. "Being as you ain't got a fiancée. Are you ready?"

"Ready?" Matt looked down at his soiled work clothes. "For what?"

"You're ready," Abbie said.

A WAVE of dizziness swept him, followed by a wave of nausea. Matt shut his eyes. They receded. When he opened his eyes again, he had a frightening sensa-

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tion of disorientation. Then he recognized his surroundings. He was on the dance floor in Springfield.

Abbie came into his arms. "All right," she said, "dance!"

Shocked, Matt began to dance, mechanically. He realized that people were staring at them as if they had dropped through a hole in the ceiling. Matt wasn't sure they hadn't. Only two other couples were on the small floor, but they had stopped dancing and were looking puzzled.

As Matt swung Abbie slowly around he saw that the sprinkling of customers at the bar had turned to stare, too. A waiter in a white jacket was coming toward them, frowning determinedly.

Abbie seemed as unconcerned about the commotion she had caused as the rainbow-hued juke box in the corner. It thumped away just below Matt's conscious level of recognition. Abbie danced lightly in his arms.

The waiter tapped Matt on the shoulder. Matt sighed with relief and stopped dancing. Immediately he found himself moving jerkily around the floor like a puppet. Abbie, he gathered, did not care to stop.

The waiter followed doggedly. "Stop that!" he said bewilderedly. "I don't know where you came from or what you think you're doing, but you can't do it in here and you can't do it dressed like that."

"I—I c-can-n't s-st-stop-p!" Matt said jerkily.

"Sure you can," the waiter said soothingly. He plodded along after them. "There's lots of things a man can't do, but he can always stop whatever you're doing. I should think you'd be glad to stop."

"W-w-would," Matt got out. "S-st-stop-p!" he whispered to Abbie.

"Tell the man to go 'way," Abbie whispered back.

Matt decided to start dancing again. It was easier than being shaken to pieces. "I think you'd better go away," he said to the waiter.

"We don't like to use force," the waiter said, frowning, "but we have to keep up a standard for our patrons. Come along quietly," he jerked on Matt's arm "or—"

The grip on Matt's arm was suddenly gone. The waiter vanished. Matt looked around wildly.

The juke box had a new decoration. Dazed, opaque-eyed, the waiter squatted on top of the box, his white jacket and whiter face a dark fool's motley in the swirling lights.

Abbie pressed herself close. Matt shuddered and swung her slowly around the floor. On the next turn, he saw that the waiter had climbed down from his perch.

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He had recruited reinforcements. Grim-faced and silent, the waiter approached, followed by another waiter, a lantern-jawed bartender, and an ugly bulldog of a man in street clothes. The manager, Matt decided.

They formed a menacing ring around Matt and Abbie.

"Whatever your game is," growled the bulldog, "we don't want to play. If you don't leave damn quick, you're going to wish you had."

Matt, looking at him, believed it. He tried to stop. Again his limbs began to jerk uncontrollably.

"I-I c-can-n't," he said. "D-d-don't y-you th-think I-I w-would if I-I c-could."

The manager stared at him with large, awed, bloodshot eyes. "Yeah," he said. "I guess you would." He shook himself. His jowls wobbled. "Okay, boys. Let's get rid of them."

"Watch yourself," said the first waiter uneasily. "One of them has a trick throw."

They closed in. Matt felt Abbie stiffen against him.

THEY vanished, one after the other, like candles being snuffed. Matt glanced unhappily at the juke box. There they were on top of the box, stacked in each other's laps like a totem pole. The pile teetered and collapsed in all directions. Dull thuds made themselves heard even above the juke box.

Matt saw them get up, puzzled and wary. The bartender was rubbing his nose. He doubled his fists and started to rush out on the floor. The manager, a wilier sort, grabbed his arm. The four of them went into consultation. Every few seconds one of them would raise his head and stare at Matt and Abbie. Finally the first waiter detached himself from the group and with an air of finality reached behind the juke box. Abruptly the music stopped; the colored lights went out. Silence fell. The four of them turned triumphantly toward the floor.

Just as abruptly, the lights went back on; the music boomed out again. They jumped.

Defiantly, the manager stepped to the wall and pulled the plug from the socket. He turned, still holding the cord. It stirred in his hand. The manager looked down at it incredulously. It wriggled. He dropped it hurriedly, with revulsion. The plug rose cobralike from its coils and began a slow, deadly, weaving dance. The manager stared, hypnotized with disbelief.

The cord struck. The manager leaped back. The bared, metal fangs bit into the floor. They retreated, all four of them, watching with wide eyes. Contemptu-

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ously, the cord turned its back on them, wriggled its way to the socket, and plugged itself in.

The music returned. Matt danced on with leaden legs. He could not stop. He would never stop. He thought of the fairy tale of the red shoes. Abbie seemed as fresh and determined as ever.

As the juke box came into sight again, Matt noticed some commotion around it. The bartender was approaching the manager with an axe, a glittering fire axe. For one whirling moment, Matt thought the whole world had gone mad. Then he saw the manager take the axe and approach the juke box cautiously, the axe poised in one hand ready to strike.

He brought it down smartly. The cord squirmed its coils out of the way. The manager wrenched the axe from the floor. Bravely he advanced closer. He looked down and screamed. The cord had a loop around one leg; the loop was tightening. Frantically the manager swung again and again. One stroke hit the cord squarely. It parted. The music stopped. The box went dark. The headless cord squirmed in dying agonies.

Abbie stopped dancing. Matt stood still, his legs trembling, sighing with relief.

"Let's go, Abbie," he pleaded. "Let's go quick."

She shook her head. "Let's sit." She led him to a table which, like the rest of the room, had been suddenly vacated of patrons. "I reckon you'd like a drink."

"I'd rather leave," Matt muttered.

THEY sat down. Imperiously, Abbie beckoned at the waiter. He came toward the table cautiously. Abbie looked inquiringly at Matt.

"Bourbon," Matt said helplessly. "Straight."

In a moment the waiter was back with a bottle and two glasses on a tray. "The boss said to get the money first," he said timidly.

Matt searched his pockets futilely. He looked at the manager, standing against one wall, glowering, his arms folded across his chest. "I haven't got any money on me," Matt said.

"That's all right," Abbie said. "Just set the things down."

"No, ma'am," the waiter began, and his eyes rolled as the tray floated out of his hand and settled to the table. He stopped talking, shut his mouth, and backed away.

Abbie was brooding, her chin in one small hand. "I ain't been a good daughter," she said. "Paw would like it here."

"No, no," Matt said hurriedly. "Don't do that. We've got enough trouble—"

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Jenkins was sitting in the third chair, blinking slowly, reeking of alcohol. Matt reached for the bottle and sloshed some into a glass. He raised it to his lips and tossed it off. The liquor burned his throat for a moment and then was gone. Matt waited expectantly as he lowered the glass to the table. He felt nothing, nothing at all. He looked suspiciously at the glass. It was still full.

Jenkins focused his eyes. "Ab!" he said. He seemed to cringe in his chair. "What you doin' here? You look different. All fixed up. Find a feller with money?"

Abbie ignored his questions. "If I asked you to do somethin', Paw, would you do it?"

"Sure, Ab," Jenkins said hurriedly. His eyes lit on the bottle of bourbon. "Anything." He raised the bottle to his lips. It gurgled pleasantly and went on gurgling.

Matt watched the level of amber liquid drop in the bottle, but when Jenkins put it down and wiped his bearded lips with one large hairy hand, the bottle was half empty and stayed that way. Jenkins sighed heavily.

Matt raised his glass again and tilted it to his lips. When he lowered it, the glass was still full and Matt was still empty. He stared moodily at the glass.

"If I asked you to hit Mr. Wright in the nose," Abbie went on, "I reckon you'd do it?"

Matt tensed himself.

"Sure, Ab, sure," Jenkins said. He turned his massive head slowly. He doubled his fist. The expression behind the beard was unreadable, but Matt decided that it was better that way. "Ain't you been treatin' mah little gal right?" Jenkins demanded. "Say, son," he said with concern, "you don't look so good." He looked back at Abbie. "Want I should hit him?"

"Not now," Abbie said. "But keep it in mind."

Matt relaxed and seized the opportunity to dash the glass to his mouth. Futilely. Not a drop of liquor reached his stomach. Hopelessly, Matt thought of Tantalus.

"Police!" Jenkins bellowed suddenly, rising up with the neck of the bottle in one huge hand.

Matt looked. The bartender was leading three policemen into the front of the room. The officers advanced stolidly, confident of their ultimate strength and authority. Matt turned quickly to Abbie.

"No tricks," he pleaded. "Not with the law."

Abbie yawned. "I'm tired. I reckon it's almost midnight."

Jenkins charged, bull-like, bellowing with rage. And the room vanished.

Matt blinked, sickened. They were back in the cabin. Abbie and

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he. "What about your father?" Matt asked.

"Next to liquor," Abbie said, "Paw likes a fight best. I'm going to bed now. I'm real tired."

She left her shoes on the floor, climbed into her bunk, and pulled the blanket around herself.

MATT walked slowly to his bunk. *Mary had a little lamb* . . . He sat down on it and pulled off his shoes, letting them thump to the floor . . . *with fleece as white as snow* . . . He pulled the blanket around his bunk and made rustling sounds, but he lay down without removing his clothes . . . *and everywhere that Mary went* . . . He lay stiffly, listening to the immediate sounds of deep breathing coming from the other bunk . . . *the lamb was sure to go* . . .

Two tortured hours crawled by. Matt sat up cautiously. He picked up his shoes from the floor. He straightened up. Slowly he tiptoed toward the door. Inch by inch, listening to Abbie's steady breathing, until he was at the door. He slipped it open, only a foot. He squeezed through and drew it shut behind him.

A porch board creaked. Matt froze. He waited. There was no sound from inside. He crept over the pebbles of the driveway, suppressing exclamations of pain. But he did not dare stop to put on his shoes.

He was beside the car. He eased the door open and slipped into the seat. Blessing the steep driveway, he released the brake and pushed in the clutch. The car began to roll. Slowly at first, then picking up speed, the car turned out of the driveway into the road.

Ghostlike in the brilliant moon, it sped silent down the long hill. After one harrowing tree-darkened turn, Matt switched on the lights and gently clicked the door to its first catch.

When he was a mile away, he started the motor.

Escape!

MATT pulled up to the gas pump in the gray dawn that was already sticky with heat. Through the dusty, bug-splattered windshield the bloodshot sun peered at him and saw a dark young man in stained work clothes, his face stubbled blackly, his eyes burning wearily. But Matt breathed deep; he drew in the wine of freedom.

Was this Fair Play or Humansville? Matt was too tired and hungry to remember. Whichever it was, all was well.

It seemed a reasonable assumption that Abbie could not find him if she did not know where he was, that she could not teleport herself anywhere she had not already been. When she had dis-

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appeared the first time, she had gone to the places in Springfield she knew. She had brought her father from his two-room shanty. She had taken him back to the cabin.

The sleepy attendant approached, and with him came a wash of apprehension to knot his stomach. Money! He had no money. Hopelessly he began to search his pockets. Without money he was stuck here, and all his money was back in his cabin with his clothes and his typewriter and his manila folder of notes.

And then his hand touched something in his hip pocket. Wonderingly, he pulled it out. It was his billfold. He peered at its contents. Four dollars in bills and three hundred in travelers' checks. "Fill it up," he said.

When had he picked up the billfold? Or had he had it all the time? He could have sworn that he had not had it when he was in the cocktail lounge in Springfield. He was almost sure that he had left it in his suit pants. The uncertainty made him vaguely uneasy. Or was it only hunger? He hadn't eaten since toying with Abbie's stolen delicacies yesterday afternoon.

"Where's a good place to eat?" he asked, as the attendant handed him change.

It was an old fellow in coveralls. He pointed a few hundred feet up the road. "See those trucks parked outside that diner?" Matt nodded. "Usual thing, when you see them outside, you can depend on good food inside. Here it don't mean a thing. Food's lousy. We got a landmark though. Truckers stop to see it." The old fellow cackled. "Name's Lola."

As Matt pulled away, the old man called after him. "Don't make no difference, anyway. No place else open."

Matt parked beside one of the large trailer trucks. Lola? He made a wry face as he got out of the car. He was through with women.

The diner, built in the shape of a railroad car, had a long counter running along one side, but it was filled with truckers in shirt sleeves, big men drinking coffee and smoking and teasing the waitress. Tiredly, Matt slipped into one of the empty booths.

The waitress detached herself from her admirers immediately and came to the booth with a glass of water in one hand, swinging her hips confidently. She had a smoldering, dark beauty, and she was well aware of it. Her black hair was cut short, and her brown eyes and tanned face were smiling. Her skirt and low-cut peasant blouse bulged generously in the right places. Some time—and not too many years in the

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future—she would be fat, but right now she was lush, ready to be picked by the right hand. Matt guessed that she would not be a waitress in a small town long. As she put the water on the table, she bent low to demonstrate just how lush she was.

The neckline drooped. Against his will, Matt's eyes drifted toward her.

"What'll you have?" the waitress said softly.

Matt swallowed. "A couple of —hotcakes," he said, "with sausages."

She straightened up slowly, smiling brightly at him. "Stack a pair," she yelled, "with links." She turned around and looked enticingly over her shoulder. "Coffee?"

Matt nodded. He smiled a little to show that he appreciated her attentions. There was no doubt about the fact that she was an attractive girl. In anyone's mind. Any other time . . .

"OUCH!" she said suddenly and straightened. She began to rub her rounded bottom vigorously and cast Matt a hurt, reproachful glance. Slowly her pained expression changed to a roguish smile. She waggled a coy finger at Matt. "Naughty, naughty!" the finger said. Matt stared at her as if she had lost her senses. He shook his head in bewilderment as she vanished behind the counter. And then he noticed that a couple of the truckers had turned around to glower at him, and Matt became absorbed in contemplating the glass of water.

It made him realize how thirsty he was. He drank the whole glassful, but it didn't seem to help much. He was just as thirsty, just as empty.

Lola wasted no time in bringing Matt's cup of coffee. She carried it casually and efficiently in one hand, not spilling a drop into the saucer. But as she neared Matt the inexplicable happened. She tripped over something invisible on the smooth floor. She stumbled. The coffee flew in a steaming arc and splashed on Matt's shirt with incredible accuracy, soaking in hotly.

Lola gasped, her hand to her mouth. Matt leaped up, pulling his shirt away from his chest, swearing. Lola grabbed a handful of paper napkins and began to dab at his shirt.

"Golly, honey, I'm sorry," she said warmly. "I can't understand how I came to trip."

She pressed herself close to him. Matt could smell the odor of gardenias.

"That's all right," he said, drawing back. "It was an accident."

She followed him up, working

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at his shirt. Matt noticed that the truckers were all watching, some darkly, the rest enviously. He slipped back into the booth.

One of the truckers guffawed. "You don't have to spill coffee on me, Lola, to make me steam," he said. The rest of the truckers laughed with him.

"Oh, shut up!" Lola told them. She turned back to Matt. "You all right, honey?"

"Sure, sure," Matt said wearily. "Just bring me the hotcakes." The coffee had cooled now. His shirt felt clammy. Matt thought about accident prones. It had to be an accident. He glanced uneasily around the diner. The only girl here was Lola.

The hotcakes were ready. She was bringing them toward the booth, but it was not a simple process. Matt had never seen slippery hotcakes before this. Lola was so busy that she forgot to swing her hips.

The hotcakes slithered from side to side on the plate. Lola juggled them, tilting the plate back and forth to keep them from sliding off. Her eyes were wide with astonishment; her mouth was a round, red "O"; her forehead was furrowed with concentration. She did an intricate, unconscious dance step to keep from losing the top hotcake.

As Matt watched, fascinated, the sausages, four of them linked together, started to slip from the plate. With something approaching sentience, they skilled off and disappeared down the low neck of Lola's blouse.

Lola shrieked. She started to wriggle, her shoulders hunched. While she tried to balance the hotcakes with one hand, the other dived into the blouse and hunted around frantically. Matt watched; the truckers watched. Lola hunted and wiggled. The hand that held the plate flew up. The hotcakes scattered.

One hit the nearest trucker in the face. He peeled it off, red and bellowing. "A joker!" He dived off the stool toward Matt.

MATT tried to get up, but the table caught him in his stomach. He climbed up on the seat. The hotcake the trucker had discarded had landed on the head of the man next to him. He stood up angrily.

Lola had finally located the elusive sausages. She drew them out of their intimate hiding place with a shout of triumph. They whipped into the open mouth of the lunging trucker. He stopped, transfixed, strangling.

"Argh-gh-uggle!" he said.

A cup crashed against the wall, close to Matt's head. Matt ducked. If he could get over the back of this booth, he could reach the door. The place was

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filled with angry shouts and angrier faces and bulky shoulders approaching. Lola took one frightened look and grabbed Matt around the knees.

"Protect me!" she said wildly.

The air was filled with missiles. Matt reached down to disengage Lola's fear-strengthened arms. He glanced up to see the trucker spitting out the last of the sausages. With a maddened yell, the trucker threw a heavy fist at Matt. Hampered as he was, Matt threw himself back hopelessly. Something ripped. The fist breezed past and crashed through a window.

Matt hung over the back of the booth, head downward, unable to get back up, unable to shake Lola loose. Everywhere he looked he could see rage-enflamed faces. He closed his eyes and surrendered himself to his fate.

From somewhere, above the tumult, came the sound of laughter, like the tinkling of little silver bells.

Then Matt was outside with no idea of how he had got there. In his hand was a strip of thin fabric. Lola's blouse. *Poor Lola,* he thought, as he threw it away. What was his fatal fascination for girls?

Behind him the diner was alive with lights and the crash of dishes and the smacking of fists on flesh. Before long they would discover that he was gone.

Matt ran to his car. It started to life when he punched the button. He backed it up, screeched it to a stop, jerked into first, and barreled onto the highway. Within twenty seconds, he was doing sixty.

He turned to look back at the diner and almost lost control of the car as he tried to absorb the implications of the contents on the back seat.

Resting neatly there were his typewriter, notes, and all his clothes.

WHEN Matt pulled to a stop on the streets of Clinton, he was feeling easier mentally and much worse physically. The dip in a secluded stream near the road, the change of clothes, and the shave—torturing as it had been in cold water—had refreshed him for a while. But that had worn off, and the lack of a night's sleep and twenty-four hours without food were catching up with him.

Better that, he thought grimly, than Abbie. He could endure anything for a time.

As for the typewriter and the notes and the clothes, there was probably some simple explanation. The one Matt liked best was that Abbie had had a change of heart; she had expected him to leave and she had made his way

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easy. She was, Matt thought, a kind-hearted child underneath it all.

The trouble with that explanation was that Matt didn't believe it.

He shrugged. There were more pressing things—money, for instance. Gas was getting low, and he needed to get something in his stomach if he was to keep up his strength for the long drive ahead. He had to cash one of his checks. That seemed simple enough. The bank was at the corner of this block. It was eleven o'clock. The bank would be open. Naturally they would cash a check.

But for some reason Matt felt uneasy.

Matt walked into the bank and went directly to a window. He countersigned one of the checks and presented it to the teller, a thin little man with a wispy mustache and a bald spot on top of his head. The teller compared the signatures and turned to the shelf at his side where bills stood in piles, some still wrapped. He counted out four twenties, a ten, a five, and five ones.

"Here you are, sir," he said politely.

Matt accepted it only because his hand was outstretched and the teller put the money in it. His eyes were fixed in horror upon a wrapped bundle of twenty dollar bills which was slowly rising from the shelf. It climbed leisurely over the top of the cage.

"What's the matter, sir?" the teller asked in alarm. "Do you feel sick?"

Matt nodded once and then tore his eyes away and shook his head vigorously. "No," he gasped. "I'm all right." He took a step back from the window.

"Are you sure? You don't look well at all."

WITH a shrinking feeling, Matt felt something fumble its way into his right hand coat pocket. He plunged his hand in after it. His empty stomach revolved in his abdomen. He could not mistake the touch of crisp paper. He stooped quickly beneath the teller's window. The teller leaned out. Matt straightened up, the package of bills in his hand.

"I guess you must have dropped this," he muttered.

The teller glanced at the shelf and back at the sheaf of twenties. "I don't see how—But thank you! That's the funniest—"

Matt pushed the bills under the grillwork. "Yes, isn't it," he agreed hurriedly. "Well, thank you."

"Thank you!"

Matt lifted his hand. The money lifted with it. The package stuck to his hand as if it

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had been attached with glue.

"Excuse me," he said feebly. "I can't seem to get rid of this money." He shook his hand. The money clung stubbornly. He shook his hand again, violently. The package of bills did not budge.

"Very funny," the teller said, but he was not smiling. From his tone of voice, Matt suspected that he thought money was a very serious business indeed. The teller reached under the bars and caught hold of one end of the package. "You can let go now," he said. "Let go!"

Matt tried to pull his hand away. "I can't!" he said, breathing heavily.

The teller tugged, Matt tugged. "I haven't time to play games," the teller panted. "Let go!"

"I don't want it," Matt said frantically. "But it seems to be stuck. Look!" He showed his hand, fingers spread wide.

The teller grabbed the bundle of bills with both hands and braced his feet against the front of his cubicle. "Let go!" he shouted.

Matt pulled hard. Suddenly the tension on his arm vanished. His arm whipped back. The teller disappeared into the bottom of the cubicle. Something clanged hollowly. Matt looked at his hand. The bills were gone.

Slowly the teller's head appeared from the concealed part of the cubicle. It came up, accompanied by groans, with a red swelling in the middle of the bald spot. After it came the teller's hand, waving the package of twenties triumphantly. The other hand was rubbing his head.

"Are you still here?" he demanded, slamming the bills down at his side. "Get out of this bank. And if you ever come back I'll have you arrested for—for disturbing the peace."

"Don't worry," Matt said. "I won't be back." His face suddenly grew pale. "Stop" he said frantically, waving his arms. "Go back!"

The teller stared at him, fearfully, indecisively.

THE bundle of twenties was rising over the top of the cage again. Instinctively, Matt grabbed them out of the air. His mind clicked rapidly. If he was to keep out of jail, there was only one thing to do. He advanced on the teller angrily, waving the bills in the air.

"What do you mean by throwing these at me!"

"Throwing money?" the teller said weakly. "Me?"

Matt shook the bills in front of the teller's nose. "What do you call this?"

The clerk glanced at the money and down at his side. "Oh, no!"

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he moaned.

"I have a good mind," Matt said violently, "to complain to the president of this bank." He slammed the bills down. He closed his eyes in a silent prayer "Tellers throwing money around!"

He took his hand away. Blissfully, the money stayed where it was on the counter. The teller reached for it feebly. The package shifted. He reached again. The bills slid away. He stuck both hands through the slot and groped wildly. The money slipped between his arms into the cage.

Matt stood shifting his weight from foot to foot, paralyzed between flight and fascination. The bundle winged its way around in the cage like a drunken butterfly. Wide-eyed and frantic, the teller chased it from side to side. He made great diving swoops for it, his hands cupped into a net. He crept up on it and pounced, catlike, only to have to slip between his fingers at the last moment. Suddenly he stopped, frozen. His hands flew to his head.

"My God!" he screamed. "What am I doing? I'm mad!"

Matt backed toward the door. The other clerks and tellers were running toward the center of the disturbance. Matt saw a dignified gentleman with a paunch stand up inside a railed-in office and hurdle the obstacle with fine

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show of athletic form.

Matt turned and ran, dodging the guard at the gate. "Get the doctor," he yelled.

From somewhere came the sound of a tinkling of little silver bells.

There was no doubt in Matt's mind as he gunned his car out of Clinton. Abbie was after him. He had not been free a moment. All the time she had known where to find him. He was the fleeing mouse, happy in his illusion of freedom—until the cat's paw comes down on his back. Matt thought of the Furies—awful Alecto, Tisiphone, Megaera—in their blood-stained robes and serpent hair pursuing him across the world with their terrible whips. But they all had Abbie's face.

Matt drove north toward Kansas City, thirsty, starving, half dead from fatigue, wondering hopelessly where it would end.

DARKENING shades of violet were creeping up the eastern sky as Matt reached Lawrence, Kansas. He had not tried to stop in Kansas City. Something had drawn him on, some buried hope that still survived feebly, and when, five miles from Lawrence, he had seen Mount Oread rise against the sunset, the white spires and red tile roofs of the university gleaming like beacons, he had known what it was.

Here was a citadel of knowledge, a fortress of the world's truth against black waves of ignorance and superstition. Here, in this saner atmosphere of study and reflection, logic and cool consideration, here, if anywhere, he could shake off this dark conviction of doom that sapped his will. Here, surely, he could think more clearly, act more decisively, rid himself of this demon of vengeance that rode his shoulders. Here he could get help.

He drove down Massachusetts Street, his body leaden with fatigue, his eyes red-rimmed and shadowed searching restlessly from side to side. His hunger was only a dull ache; he could almost forget it. But his thirst was a live thing. Somewhere—he could not remember where—he had eaten and drunk, but they had vanished from his throat as he swallowed.

Is there no end? he thought wildly. *Is there no way out?* There was, of course. There always is. *Always—Mary had a little lamb . . .*

Impulse swung his car into the diagonal parking space. First he was going to drink and eat, come what may. He walked into the restaurant. Summer students filled the room, young men in sport shirts and slacks, girls in gay cotton prints and saddle shoes, laughing, talking, eating . . .

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Swaying in the doorway, Matt watched them, bleary-eyed. *Once I was like them,* he thought dully. *Young and alive and conscious that these were the best years I would ever know. Now I am old and used up, doomed . . .*

He slumped down at a table near the front, filled with a great surge of sorrow that all happiness was behind him. He was conscious that the waitress was beside him. "Soup," he mumbled. "Soup and milk." He did not look up.

"Yes, sir," she said. Her voice sounded vaguely familiar, but they are all the same, all the voices of youth. He had eaten here before. He did not look up.

Slowly he raised the glass of water to his lips. It went down his throat in dusty gulps. It spread out in his stomach in cool, blessed waves. Matt closed his eyes thankfully. The hunger pains began to return. For a moment Matt regretted the soup and wished he had ordered steak.

After the soup, he thought.

The soup came. Matt lifted a spoonful. He let it trickle down his throat.

"Feelin' better, Mr. Wright," said the waitress.

MATT looked up. He strangled. It was Abbie! Abbie's face bending over him. Matt choked and spluttered. Students turned to stare. Matt gazed around the room wildly. The girls—they all looked like Abbie. He stood up, almost knocking over the table as he ran to the front door.

With his hand on the door knob, he stopped, paralyzed. Staring in at him, through the glass, was a pair of bloodshot eyes set above an unruly black nest. Stooped, powerful shoulders loomed behind the face. As Matt stared back, the eyes lighted up as if they recognized him.

"Argh-gh!" Matt screamed.

He staggered back and turned on trembling legs. He tottered toward the back of the restaurant. The aisle seemed full of feet put out to trip him. He stumbled to the swinging kitchen door and broke through into odors of frying and baking that no longer moved him.

The cook looked up, startled. Matt ran on through the kitchen and plunged through the back door. The alley was dark. Matt barked his shins on a box. He limped on, cursing. At one end of the alley a street light spread a pool of welcome. Matt ran toward it. He was panting. His heart beat fast. Then it almost stopped. A shadow lay along the mouth of the alley. A long shadow with huge shoulders and something that waved from the chin.

Matt spun. He ran frantically toward the other end of the alley.

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His mind raced like an engine that has broken its governor. Nightmarish terror streaked through his arms and legs; they seemed distant and leaden. But slowly he approached the other end. He came nearer. Nearer.

A shadow detached itself from the dark back walls. But it was no shadow. Matt slowed, stopped. The shadow came closer, towering tall above him. Matt cowered, unable to move. Closer. Two long arms reached out toward him. Matt quivered. He waited for the end. The arms wrapped around him. They drew him close.

"Son, son," Jenkins said weakly. "Yore the first familiar face I seen all day."

Matt's heart started beating again. He drew back, extracting his face from Jenkin's redolent beard.

"Cain't understand what's goin' on these days," Jenkins said shaking his head sadly, "but I got a feelin' Ab's behint it. Just as that fight got goin' good, the whole shebang disappeared and here I was. Where am I, son?"

"Kansas," Matt said. "Lawrence, Kansas."

"Kansas?" Jenkins wobbled his beard. "Last I heard, Kansas was dry, but it can't be half as dry as I am. I recollect hearin' Quantrell burned this town. Too bad it didn't stay burned. Here I was without a penny in my pocket and only what was left in the bottle I had in my hand to keep me from dyin' of thirst. Son," he said sorrowfully, "somethin's got to be done. It's Ab, ain't it?"

Matt nodded.

"Son," Jenkins went on, "I'm gettin' too old for this kind of life. I should be sittin' on my porch with a jug in my lap, just a-rockin' slow. Somethin's got to be done about that gal."

"I'm afraid it's too late for that," Matt said.

"That's the trouble," Jenkins said mournfully. "Been too late for these six years. Son, yore an edyicated man. What we gonna do?"

"I can't tell you, Jenkins," Matt said. "I can't even think about it." *Mary had a little lamb* . . . "If I did, it wouldn't work. But if you want to hit me, go ahead. I'm the man who's responsible."

Jenkins put a large hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, son. If it weren't you, it would've been some other man. When Ab gets a notion, you cain't beat it out of her. I learned that years ago."

Matt pulled out his billfold and handed Jenkins a five dollar bill. "Here. Kansas isn't dry any more. Go get something and try to forget. Maybe when you're finished with that, things will have changed."

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"Yore a good boy, son. Don't do nothin' rash."

Mary had a little lamb . . .

JENKINS turned, raising his hand in a parting salute. Matt watched the mountainous shadow dwindle, as if it was his last contact with the living. Then Jenkins rounded the corner and was out of sight.

Matt walked slowly back to Massachusetts Street. There was one more thing he had to do.

As he reached the car, Matt sensed Abbie's nearness. The awareness was so sharp that it was almost physical. He felt her all around, like dancing motes of dust that are only visible under certain conditions, half angel, half devil, half love, half hate. It was an unendurable mixture, an impossible combination to live with. The extremes were too great.

Matt sighed. It was not Abbie's fault. If it was anyone's fault, it was his. Inevitably, he would pay for it. The Universe has an immutable law of action and reaction.

It was dark as Matt drove along Seventh Street. The night was warm, and the infrequent street lights were only beacons for nightflying insects. Matt turned a corner and pulled up in front of a big old house surrounded by an ornamental iron fence. The house was a two-story stucco, painted yellow—or perhaps it had once been white—and the fence sagged in places.

Most of the houses in Lawrence are old. The finest and the newest are in the west, on the ridge overlooking the Wakarusa Valley, but university professors cannot afford such sites or such houses.

Matt rang the bell. In a moment the door opened. Blinking out of the light was Professor Franklin, his faculty adviser.

"Matt!" Franklin said. "I didn't recognize you for a second. What are you doing back so soon? I thought you were secluded in the Ozarks. Don't tell me you have your thesis finished already?"

"No, Dr. Franklin," Matt said wearily, "but I'd like to talk to you for a moment if you can spare the time."

"Come in, come in. I'm just grading some papers." Franklin grimaced. "Freshman papers."

Franklin led the way into his book-cluttered study off the living room. His glasses were resting on top of a pile of papers. He picked them up, slipped them on, and turned to Matt. He was a tall man, a little stooped now in his sixties, with gray, unruly hair.

"Matt!" he exclaimed. "You aren't looking well. Have you been sick?"

"In a way," Matt said, "you might call it that. How would you treat someone who believes

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in the reality of psychic phenomena?"

Franklin shrugged. "Lots of people believe in it and are still worthwhile, reliable members of society. Conan Doyle, for instance—"

"And could prove it," Matt added.

"Hallucinations? Then it becomes more serious. I suppose psychiatric treatment would be necessary. Remember, Matt, I'm a teacher, not a practitioner. But look here, you aren't suggesting that—?"

Matt nodded. "I can prove it, and I don't want to. Would it make the world any better, any happier?"

"The truth is always important—for itself if for nothing else. But you can't be serious—"

"Dead serious." Matt shivered. "Suppose I could prove that there were actually such things as levitation, teleportation, telepathy. There isn't any treatment, is there, Professor, when a man goes sane?"

"Matt! You are sick, aren't you?"

"Suppose," Matt went on relentlessly, "that your glasses should float over and come to rest on my nose. What would you say then?"

"I'd say you need to see a psychiatrist," Franklin said worriedly. "You do, Matt."

HIS glasses gently detached themselves and floated leisurely through the air and adjusted themselves on Matt's face. Franklin stared blindly.

"Matt!" he exclaimed, groping. "That isn't very funny."

Matt sighed and handed the glasses back. Franklin put them back on, frowning.

"Suppose," Matt said, "I should float in the air?" As he spoke, he felt himself lifting.

Franklin looked up. "Come down here!"

Matt came back into his chair.

"These tricks," Franklin said sternly, "aren't very seemly. Go to a doctor, Matt. Don't waste any time. And," he added, taking off his glasses and polishing them vigorously, "I think I'll see my oculist in the morning."

Matt sighed again. "I was afraid that was the way it would be. Abbie?"

Franklin stared.

"Yes, Mr. Wright." The words, soft and gentle, came out of midair.

Franklin's eyes searched the room frantically.

"Thanks," Matt said.

"Leave this house!" Franklin said, his voice trembling. "I've had enough of these pranks!"

Matt got up and went to the front door. "I'm afraid Dr. Franklin doesn't believe in you. But I do. Good-by, Dr. Franklin.

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I don't think a doctor would cure what I've got."

When he left, Franklin was searching the living room.

THERE was something strangely final about the drive through the campus. Along Oread street on top of Mount Oread, overlooking the Kaw Valley on the north and the Wakarusa on the south, the university buildings stood dark and deserted. Only the Student Union was lighted and the library and an occasional bulletin board. The long arms of the administration building were gloomy, and the night surrounded the white arches of Hoch Auditorium . . .

He pulled into the parking area behind the apartment building and got out and walked slowly to the entrance. He hoped that Guy wouldn't be in.

Matt opened the door. The apartment was empty. He turned on a living room lamp. The room was in typical disarray. A sweater on the davenport, books in the chair.

In the dark, Matt went to the kitchen. He bumped into the stove and swore, and rubbed his hip. *Mary had a little lamb . . .* Somewhere around here . . .

Some hidden strength kept Matt from dropping in his tracks. He should have collapsed from exhaustion and hunger long ago. But soon there would be time to rest . . . *and everywhere that Mary went* . . . He stooped. There it was. The sugar. The sugar. He had always liked blue sugar.

He found a package of cereal and got the milk from the refrigerator. He found a sharp knife in the drawer and sliced the box in two. He dumped the contents into a bowl and poured the milk over it and sprinkled the sugar on top. The blue sugar . . . *with fleece as white as snow* . . . He was very sleepy.

He lifted a spoonful of the cereal to his mouth. He chewed it for a moment. He swallowed . . .

And it was gone.

He grabbed the knife and plunged it toward his chest.

And his hand was empty.

He was very sleepy. His head drooped. Suddenly it straightened up. The hissing had stopped. A long time ago. He turned on the light and saw that the burner was turned off, the one that never lighted from the pilot, the one he had stumbled against.

The blue insect poison had failed and the knife and the gas.

He felt a great wave of despair. It was no use. There was no way out.

HE walked back to the living room, brushed the sweater off the davenport, and sat down. The last hope—beyond which there is

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no hope—was gone. And yet, in a way, he was glad that his tricks had not worked. Not that he was still alive but because it had been the coward's way. All along he had been trying to dodge the only solution that faced him at every turn. He had refused to recognize it, but now there was no other choice.

It was the hard way, the bitter way. The way that was not a quick death but a slow one. But he owed it to the world to sacrifice himself on the altar he had raised, under the knife he had honed, wielded by the arm that he had given strength and skill and consciousness.

He looked up. "All right, Abbie," he sighed. "I'll marry you."

The words hung in the air. Matt waited, filled with a fear that was half hope.

Was it too late for anything but vengeance?

But Abbie filled his arms, cuddled against him in homely blue gingham, scarcely bigger than a child but with the warmth and softness of a woman. She was more beautiful than Matt had remembered. Her arms crept around his neck.

"Will you, Mr. Wright?" she whispered. "Will you?"

A vision built itself up in his mind. The omniscient, omnipotent wife, fearsome when her powers were sheathed, terrible in anger or disappointment. No man, he thought, was ever called upon for greater sacrifice. But he was the appointed lamb.

He sighed. "God help me," he said, "I will."

He kissed her. Her lips were sweet and passionate.

MATTHEW Wright was lucky, of course, far luckier than he deserved to be, than any man deserves to be.

The bride was beautiful. But more important and much more significant—

The bride was happy.

—JAMES E. GUNN

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SPECIALIST

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

THE photon storm struck without warning, pouncing upon the Ship from behind a bank of giant red stars. Eye barely had time to flash a last second warning through Talker before it was upon them.

It was Talker's third journey into deep space, and his first light-pressure storm. He felt a sudden pang of fear as the Ship yawed violently, caught the force of the wave-front and careened end for end. Then the fear was gone, replaced by a strong pulse of excitement.

Why should he be afraid, he asked himself—hadn't he been

Illustrated by CALLE

Recruiting all the parts of a ship works great... unless you suddenly run out of recruits!

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trained for just this sort of emergency?

He had been talking to Feeder when the storm hit, but he cut off the conversation abruptly. He hoped Feeder would be all right. It was the youngster's first deep space trip.

The wirelike filaments that made up most of Talker's body were extended throughout the Ship. Quickly he withdrew all except the ones linking him to Eye, Engine, and the Walls. This was strictly their job now. The rest of the Crew would have to shift for themselves until the storm was over.

Eye had flattened his disklike body against a Wall, and had one seeing organ extended outside the Ship. For greater concentration, the rest of his seeing organs were collapsed, clustered against his body.

Through Eye's seeing organ, Talker watched the storm. He translated Eye's purely visual image into a direction for Engine, who shoved the Ship around to meet the waves. At appreciably the same time, Talker translated direction into velocity for the Walls, who stiffened to meet the shocks.

The coordination was swift and sure—Eye measuring the waves, Talker relaying the messages to Engine and Walls, Engine driving the ship nose-first into the waves, and Walls bracing to meet the shock.

Talker forgot any fear he might have had in the swiftly functioning teamwork. He had no time to think. As the Ship's communication system, he had to translate and flash his messages at top speed, coordinating information and directing action.

In a matter of minutes, the storm was over.

"ALL right," Talker said. Let's see if there was any damage." His filaments had become tangled during the storm, but he untwisted and extended them through the Ship, plugging everyone into circuit. "Engine?"

"I'm fine," Engine said. The tremendous old fellow had dampened his plates during the storm, easing down the atomic explosions in his stomach. No storm could catch an experienced spacer like Engine unaware.

"Walls?"

The Walls reported one by one, and this took a long time. There were almost a thousand of them, thin, rectangular fellows making up the entire skin of the Ship. Naturally, they had reinforced their edges during the storm, giving the whole Ship resiliency. But one or two were dented badly.

Doctor announced that he was all right. He removed Talker's

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filament from his head, taking himself out of circuit, and went to work on the dented Walls. Made mostly of hands, Doctor had clung to an Accumulator during the storm.

"Let's go a little faster now," Talker said, remembering that there still was the problem of determining where they were. He opened the circuit to the four Accumulators. "How are you?" he asked.

There was no answer. The Accumulators were asleep. They had had their receptors open during the storm and were bloated on energy. Talker twitched his filaments around them, but they didn't stir.

"Let me," Feeder said. Feeder had taken quite a beating before planting his suction cups to a Wall, but his cockiness was intact. He was the only member of the Crew who never needed Doctor's attention; his body was quite capable of repairing itself.

He scuttled across the floor on a dozen or so tentacles, and booted the nearest Accumulator. The big, conial storage unit opened one eye, then closed it again. Feeder kicked him again, getting no response. He reached for the Accumulator's safety valve and drained off some energy.

"Stop that," the Accumulator said.

"Then wake up and report," Talker told him.

The Accumulators said testily that they were all right, as any fool could see. They had been anchored to the floor during the storm.

THE rest of the inspection went quickly. Thinker was fine, and Eye was ecstatic over the beauty of the storm. There was only one casualty.

Pusher was dead. Bipedal, he didn't have the stability of the rest of the Crew. The storm had caught him in the middle of a floor, thrown him against a stiffened Wall, and broken several of his important bones. He was beyond Doctor's skill to repair.

They were silent for a while. It was always serious when a part of the Ship died. The Ship was a cooperative unit, composed entirely of the Crew. The loss of any member was a blow to all the rest.

It was especially serious now. They had just delivered a cargo to a port several thousand light-years from Galactic Center. There was no telling where they might be.

Eye crawled to a Wall and extended a seeing organ outside. The Walls let it through, then sealed around it. Eye's organ pushed out, far enough from the Ship so he could view the entire

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sphere of stars. The picture traveled through Talker, who gave it to Thinker.

Thinker lay in one corner of the room, a great shapeless blob of protoplasm. Within him were all the memories of his space-going ancestors. He considered the picture, compared it rapidly with others stored in his cells, and said, "No galactic planets within reach."

Talker automatically translated for everyone. It was what they had feared.

Eye, with Thinker's help, calculated that they were several hundred light-years off their course, on the galactic periphery.

Every Crew member knew what that meant. Without a Pusher to boost the Ship to a multiple of the speed of light, they would never get home. The trip back, without a Pusher, would take longer than most of their lifetimes.

"What would you suggest?" Talker asked Thinker.

This was too vague a question for the literal-minded Thinker. He asked to have it rephrased.

"What would be our best line of action," Talker asked, "to get back to a galactic planet?"

Thinker needed several minutes to go through all the possibilities stored in his cells. In the meantime, Doctor had patched the Walls and was asking to be given something to eat.

"In a little while we'll all eat," Talker said, twitching his tendrils nervously. Even though he was the second youngest Crew member — only Feeder was younger—the responsibility was largely on him. This was still an emergency; he had to coordinate information and direct action.

ONE of the Falls suggested that they get good and drunk. This unrealistic solution was vetoed at once. It was typical of the Walls' attitude, however. They were fine workers and good shipmates, but happy-go-lucky fellows at best. When they returned to their home planets, they would probably blow all their wages on a spree.

"Loss of Ship's Pusher cripples the Ship for sustained faster-than-light speeds," Thinker began without preamble. "The nearest galactic planet is four hundred and five light-years off."

Talker translated all this instantly along his wave-packet body.

"Two courses of action are open. First, the Ship can proceed to the nearest galactic planet under atomic power from Engine. This will take approximately two hundred years. Engine might still be alive at this time, although no one else will.

"Second, locate a primitive

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planet in this region, upon which are latent Pushers. Find one and train him. Have him push the Ship back to galactic territory."

Thinker was silent, having given all the possibilities he could find in the memories of his ancestors.

They held a quick vote and decided upon Thinker's second alternative. There was no choice, really. It was the only one which offered them any hope of getting back to their homes.

"All right," Talker said. "Let's eat. I think we all deserve it."

The body of the dead Pusher was shoved into the mouth of Engine, who consumed it at once, breaking down the atoms to energy. Engine was the only member of the Crew who lived on atomic energy.

For the rest, Feeder dashed up and loaded himself from the nearest Accumulator. Then he transformed the food within him into the substances each member ate. His body chemistry changed, altered, adapted, making the different foods for the Crew.

Eye lived entirely on a complex chlorophyl chain. Feeder reproduced this for him, then went over to give Talker his hydrocarbons, and the Walls their chlorine compound. For Doctor he made a facsimile of a silicate fruit that grew on Doctor's native planet.

FINALLY, feeding was over and the Ship back in order. The Accumulators were stacked in a corner, blissfully sleeping again. Eye was extending his vision as far as he could, shaping his main seeing organ for high-powered telescopic reception. Even in this emergency, Eye couldn't resist making verses. He announced that he was at work on a new narrative poem, called *Peripheral Glow*. No one wanted to hear it, so Eye fed it to Thinker, who stored everything, good or bad, right or wrong.

Engine never slept. Filled to the brim on Pusher, he shoved the Ship along at several times the speed of light.

The Walls were arguing among themselves about who had been the drunkest during their last leave.

Talker decided to make himself comfortable. He released his hold on the Walls and swung in the air, his small round body suspended by his crisscrossed network of filaments.

He thought briefly about Pusher. It was strange. Pusher had been everyone's friend and now he was forgotten. That wasn't because of indifference; it was because the Ship was a unit. The loss of a member was regretted, but the important thing was for the unit to go on.

The Ship raced through the

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suns of the periphery.

Thinker laid out a search spiral, calculating their odds on finding a Pusher planet at roughly four to one. In a week they found a planet of primitive Walls. Dropping low, they could see the leathery, rectangular fellows basking in the sun, crawling over rocks, stretching themselves thin in order to float in the breeze.

All the Ship's Walls heaved a sigh of nostalgia. It was just like home.

These Walls on the planet hadn't been contacted by a galactic team yet, and were still unaware of their great destiny—to join in the vast Cooperation of the Galaxy.

There were plenty of dead worlds in the spiral, and worlds too young to bear life. They found a planet of Talkers. The Talkers had extended their spidery communication lines across half a continent.

Talker looked at them eagerly, through Eye. A wave of self-pity washed over him. He remembered home, his family, his friends. He thought of the tree he was planning to buy when he got back.

For a moment, Talker wondered what he was doing here, part of a Ship in a far corner of the Galaxy.

He shrugged off the mood. They were bound to find a Pusher planet, if they looked long enough.

At least, he hoped so.

THERE was a long stretch of arid worlds as the Ship pushed through the unexplored periphery. Then a planetful of primeval Engines, swimming in a radioactive ocean.

"This is rich territory," Feeder said to Talker. "Galactic should send a Contact party here."

"They probably will, after we get back," Talker said.

They were good friends, above and beyond the all-enveloping friendship of the Crew. It wasn't only because they were the youngest Crew members, although that had something to do with it. They both had the same kind of functions and that made for a certain rapport. Talker translated languages; Feeder transformed foods. Also, they looked somewhat alike. Talker was a central core with radiating filaments; Feeder was a central core with radiating tentacles.

Talker thought that Feeder was the next most aware being on the Ship. He was never really able to understand how some of the others carried on the processes of consciousness.

More suns, more planets. Engine started to overheat. Usually, Engine was used only for taking

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off and landing, and for fine maneuvering in a planetary group. Now he had been running continuously for weeks, both over and under the speed of light. The strain was telling on him.

Feeder, with Doctor's help, rigged a cooling system for him. It was crude, but it had to suffice. Feeder rearranged nitrogen, oxygen and hydrogen atoms to make a coolant for the system. Doctor diagnosed a long rest for Engine. He said that the gallant old fellow couldn't stand the strain for more than a week.

The search continued, with the Crew's spirits gradually dropping. They all realized that Pushers were rather rare in the Galaxy, as compared to the fertile Walls and Engines.

The Walls were getting pockmarked from interstellar dust. They complained that they would need a full beauty treatment when they got home. Talker assured them that the company would pay for it.

Even Eye was getting bloodshot from staring into space so continuously.

They dipped over another planet. Its characteristics were flashed to Thinker, who mulled over them.

Closer, and they could make out the forms.

Pushers! Primitive Pushers!

They zoomed back into space to make plans. Feeder produced twenty-three different kinds of intoxicants for a celebration.

The Ship wasn't fit to function for three days.

"EVERYONE ready now?" Talker asked, a bit fuzzily. He had a hangover that burned all along his nerve ends. What a drunk he had thrown! He had a vague recollection of embracing Engine, inviting him to share his tree when they got back home.

He shuddered at the idea.

The rest of the Crew were pretty shaky, too. The Walls were letting air leak into space; they were just too wobbly to seal their edges properly. Doctor had passed out.

But the worst off was Feeder. Since his system could adapt to any type of fuel except atomic, he had been sampling every batch he made, whether it was an unbalanced iodine, pure oxygen or a supercharged ester. He was really miserable. His tentacles, usually a healthy aqua, were shot through with orange streaks. His system was working furiously, purging itself of everything, and Feeder was suffering the effects of the purge.

The only sober ones were Thinker and Engine. Thinker didn't drink, which was unusual for a spacer, though typical of Thinker, and Engine couldn't.

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They listened while Thinker reeled off some astounding facts. From Eye's pictures of the planet's surface, Thinker had detected the presence of metallic construction. He put forth the alarming suggestion that these Pushers had constructed a mechanical civilization.

"That's impossible," three of the Walls said flatly, and most of the Crew were inclined to agree with them. All the metal they had ever seen had been buried in the ground or lying around in worthless oxidized chunks.

"Do you mean that they make things out of metal?" Talker demanded. "Out of just plain dead metal? What could they make?"

"They couldn't make anything," Feeder said positively. "It would break down constantly. I mean metal doesn't *know* when it's weakening."

But it seemed to be true. Eye magnified his pictures, and everyone could see that the Pushers had made vast shelters, vehicles, and other articles from inanimate material.

The reason for this was not readily apparent, but it wasn't a good sign. However, the really hard part was over. The Pusher planet had been found. All that remained was the relatively easy job of convincing a native Pusher, which shouldn't be too hard. Talker knew that cooperation was the keystone of the Galaxy, even among primitive peoples.

The Crew decided not to land in a populated region. Of course, there was no reason not to expect a friendly greeting, but it was the job of a Contact Team to get in touch with them as a race. All they wanted was an individual.

Accordingly, they picked out a sparsely populated land-mass, drifting in while that side of the planet was dark.

They were able to locate a solitary Pusher almost at once.

EYE adapted his vision to see in the dark, and they followed the Pusher's movements. He lay down, after a while, beside a small fire. Thinker told them that this was a well-known resting habit of Pushers.

Just before dawn, the Walls opened, and Feeder, Talker and Doctor came out.

Feeder dashed forward and tapped the creature on the shoulder. Talker followed with a communication tendril.

The Pusher opened his seeing organs, blinked them, and made a movement with his eating organ. Then he leaped to his feet and started to run.

The three Crew members were astounded. The Pusher hadn't even waited to find out what

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the three of them wanted!

Talker extended a filament rapidly, and caught the Pusher, fifty feet away, by a limb. The Pusher fell.

"Treat him gently," Feeder said. "He might be startled by our appearance." He twitched his tendrils at the idea of a Pusher—one of the strangest sights in the Galaxy, with his multiple organs—being startled at someone else's appearance.

Feeder and Doctor scurried to the fallen Pusher, picked him up and carried him back to the Ship.

The Walls sealed again. They released the Pusher and prepared to talk.

As soon as he was free, the Pusher sprang to his limbs and ran at the place where the Walls had sealed. He pounded against them frantically, his eating organ open and vibrating.

"Stop that," the Wall said. He bulged, and the Pusher tumbled to the floor. Instantly, he jumped up and started to run forward.

"Stop him," Talker said. "He might hurt himself."

One of the Accumulators woke up enough to roll into the Pusher's path. The Pusher fell, got up again, and ran on.

Talker had his filaments in the front of the Ship also, and he caught the Pusher in the bow. The Pusher started to tear at his tendrils, and Talker let go hastily.

"Plug him into the communication system!" Feeder shouted. "Maybe we can reason with him!"

Talker advanced a filament toward the Pusher's head, waving it in the universal sign of communication. But the Pusher continued his amazing behavior, jumping out of the way. He had a piece of metal in his hand and he was waving it frantically.

"What do you think he's going to do with that?" Feeder asked. The Pusher started to attack the side of the Ship, pounding at one of the Walls. The Wall stiffened instinctively and the metal snapped.

"Leave him alone," Talker said. "Give him a chance to calm down."

•

TALKER consulted with Thinker, but they couldn't decide what to do about the Pusher. He wouldn't accept communication. Every time Talker extended a filament, the Pusher showed all the signs of violent panic. Temporarily, it was an impasse.

Thinker vetoed the plan of finding another Pusher on the planet. He considered this Pusher's behavior typical; nothing would be gained by approaching another. Also, a planet was sup-

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posed to be contacted only by a Contact Team.

If they couldn't communicate with this Pusher, they never would with another on the planet.

"I think I know what the trouble is," Eye said. He crawled up on an Accumulator. "These Pushers have evolved a mechanical civilization. Consider for a minute how they went about it. They developed the use of their fingers, like Doctor, to shape metal. They utilized their seeing organs, like myself. And probably countless other organs." He paused for effect.

"These Pushers have become unspecialized!"

They argued over it for several hours. The Walls maintained that no intelligent creature could be unspecialized. It was unknown in the Galaxy. But the evidence was before them—The Pusher cities, their vehicles . . . This Pusher, exemplifying the rest, seemed capable of a multitude of things.

He was able to do everything except Push!

Thinker supplied a partial explanation. "This is not a primitive planet. It is relatively old and should have been in the Cooperation thousands of years ago. Since it was not, the Pushers upon it were robbed of their birthright. Their ability, their specialty, was to Push, but there was nothing to Push. Naturally, they have developed a deviant culture.

"Exactly what this culture is, we can only guess. But on the basis of the evidence, there is reason to believe that these Pushers are—uncooperative."

Thinker had a habit of uttering the most shattering statement in the quietest possible way.

"It is entirely possible," Thinker went on inexorably, "that these Pushers will have nothing to do with us. In which case, our chances are approximately 283 to one against finding another Pusher planet."

"We can't be sure he won't cooperate," Talker said, "until we get him into communication." He found it almost impossible to believe that any intelligent creature would refuse to cooperate willingly.

"But how?" Feeder asked. They decided upon a course of action. Doctor walked slowly up to the Pusher, who backed away from him. In the meantime, Talker extended a filament outside the Ship, around, and in again, behind the Pusher.

The Pusher backed against a Wall—and Talker shoved the filament through the Pusher's head, into the communication socket in the center of his brain.

The Pusher collapsed.

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WHEN he came to, Feeder and Doctor had to hold the Pusher's limbs, or he would have ripped out the communication line. Talker exercised his skill in learning the Pusher's language.

It wasn't too hard. All Pusher languages were of the same family, and this was no exception. Talker was able to catch enough surface thoughts to form a pattern.

He tried to communicate with the Pusher.

The Pusher was silent.

"I think he needs food," Feeder said. They remembered that it had been almost two days since they had taken the Pusher on board. Feeder worked up some standard Pusher food and offered it.

"My God! A steak!" the Pusher said.

The Crew cheered along Talker's communication circuits. The Pusher had said his first words!

Talker examined the words and searched his memory. He knew about two hundred Pusher languages and many more simple variations. He found that this Pusher was speaking a cross of two Pusher tongues.

After the Pusher had eaten, he looked around. Talker caught his thoughts and broadcast them to the Crew.

The Pusher had a queer way of looking at the Ship. He saw it as a riot of colors. The walls undulated. In front of him was something resembling a gigantic spider, colored black and green, with his web running all over the Ship and into the heads of all the creatures. He saw Eye as a strange, naked little animal, something between a skinned rabbit and an egg yolk—whatever those things were.

Talker was fascinated by the new perspective the Pusher's mind gave him. He had never seen things that way before. But now that the Pusher was pointing it out, Eye *was* a pretty funny-looking creature.

They settled down to communication.

"What in hell are you things?" the Pusher asked, much calmer now than he had been during the two days. "Why did you grab me? Have I gone nuts?"

"No," Talker said, "you are not psychotic. We are a galactic trading ship. We were blown off our course by a storm and our Pusher was killed."

"Well, what does that have to do with me?"

"We would like you to join our crew," Talker said, "to be our new Pusher."

THE Pusher thought it over after the situation was explained to him. Talker could catch the feeling of conflict in the

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Pusher's thoughts. He hadn't decided whether to accept this as a real situation or not. Finally, the Pusher decided that he wasn't crazy.

"Look, boys," he said, "I don't know what you are or how this makes sense. I have to get out of here. I'm on a furlough, and if I don't get back soon, the U. S. Army's going to be very interested."

Talker asked the Pusher to give him more information about "army," and he fed it to Thinker.

"These Pushers engage in personal combat," was Thinker's conclusion.

"But *why?*" Talker asked. Sadly he admitted to himself that Thinker might have been right; the Pusher didn't show many signs of willingness to cooperate.

"I'd like to help you lads out," Pusher said, "but I've got a war to fight. Besides, I don't know where you get the idea that I could push anything this size. You'd need a whole division of tanks just to budge it."

"Do you approve of this war?" Talker asked, getting a suggestion from Thinker.

"Nobody likes war—not those who have to do the dying at least."

"Then why do you fight it?"

The Pusher made a gesture with his eating organ, which Eye picked up and sent to Thinker. "It's kill or be killed. You guys know what war is, don't you?"

"We don't have any wars," Talker said.

"You're lucky," the Pusher said bitterly. "We do. Plenty of them."

"Of course," Talker said. He had the full explanation from Thinker now. "Would you like to end them?"

"Of course I would."

"Then come with us. Be our Pusher."

The Pusher stood up and walked up to an Accumulator. He sat down on it and doubled the ends of his upper limbs.

"How the hell can I stop all wars?" the Pusher demanded. "I'm just Private Dave Martinson. Even if I went to the big shots and told them—"

"You won't have to," Talker said. "All you have to do is come with us. Push us to our base. Galactic will send a Contact Team to your planet. That will end your wars."

"The hell you say," the Pusher replied. "You boys are stranded here, huh? Good enough. No monsters are going to take over Earth."

BEWILDEREDLY, Talker tried to understand the reasoning. Had he said something wrong? Was it possible that the

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Pusher didn't understand him?

"I thought you wanted to end wars," Talker said.

"Sure I do. But I don't want anyone *making* us stop. I'm no traitor. I'd rather fight."

"No one will make you stop. You just will stop because there will be no further need for fighting."

"Do you know why we're fighting?"

"It's obvious."

"Yeah? What's your explanation?"

"You Pushers have been separated from the main stream of the Galaxy," Talker explained. "You have your specialty—pushing—but nothing to Push. Accordingly, you have no real jobs. You play with things—metal, inanimate objects—but find no real satisfaction. Robbed of your true vocation, you fight from sheer frustration.

"Once you find your place in the galactic Cooperation—and I assure you that it is an important place—your fighting will stop. Why should you fight, which is an unnatural occupation, when you can Push? Also, your mechanical civilization will end, since there will be no need for it."

The Pusher shook his head in what Talker guessed was a gesture of confusion. "What is this pushing?"

Talker told him as best he could. Since the job was out of his scope, he had only a general idea of what a Pusher did.

"You mean to say that *that* is what every Earthman should be doing?"

"Of course," Talker said. "It is your great specialty."

The Pusher thought about it for several minutes. "I think you want a physicist or a mentalist or something. I could never do anything like that. I'm a junior architect. And besides—well, it's difficult to explain."

But Talker had already caught Pusher's objection. He saw a Pusher female in his thoughts. No, two, three. And he caught a feeling of loneliness, strangeness. The Pusher was filled with doubts. He was afraid.

"When we reach galactic," Talker said, hoping it was the right thing, "you can meet other Pushers. Pusher females, too. All you Pushers look alike, so you should become friends with them. As far as loneliness in the Ship goes—it just doesn't exist. You don't understand the Cooperation yet. No one is lonely in the Cooperation."

THE Pusher was still considering the idea of there being other Pushers. Talker couldn't understand why he was so startled at that. The Galaxy was

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filled with Pushers, Feeders, Talkers, and many other species, endlessly duplicated.

"I can't believe that anybody could end all war," Pusher said. "How do I know you're not lying? I won't go."

Talker felt as if he had been struck in the face. Thinker must have been right when he said these Pushers would be uncooperative. Was this going to be the end of Talker's career? Were he and the rest of the Crew going to spend the rest of their lives in space, because of the stupidity of a bunch of Pushers?

Even thinking this, Talker was able to feel sorry for the Pusher. It must be terrible, he thought. Doubting, uncertain, never trusting anyone. If these Pushers didn't find their place in the Galaxy, they would exterminate themselves. Their place in the Cooperation was long overdue.

"What can I do to convince you?" Talker asked.

In despair, he opened all the circuits to the Pusher. He let the Pusher see Engine's good-natured gruffness, the devil - may - care humor of the Walls; he showed him Eye's poetic attempts, and Feeder's cocky good nature. He opened his own mind and showed the Pusher a picture of his home planet, his family, the tree he was planning to buy when he got home.

The pictures told the story of all of them, from different planets, representing different ethics, united by a common bond—the galactic Cooperation.

The Pusher watched it all in silence.

After a while, he shook his head. The thought accompanying the gesture was uncertain, weak—but negative.

Talker told the Walls to open. They did, and the Pusher looked at his own planet in amazement.

"You may leave," Talker said. "Just remove the communication line and go."

"What will you do?"

"We will look for another Pusher planet."

"Where? Mars? Venus?"

"We don't know. All we can do is hope there is another in this region."

The Pusher looked at the opening, then back at the Crew. He hesitated and his face screwed up in a grimace of indecision.

"All that you showed me was true?"

No answer was necessary.

"ALL right," the Pusher said suddenly. "I'll go. I'm a damned fool, but I'll go. If this means what you say—it *must* mean what you say!"

Talker saw that the agony of the Pusher's decision had forced him out of contact with reality.

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He believed that he was back in a dream, where decisions are easy and unimportant.

"There's just one little trouble," Pusher said with the lightness of hysteria. "Boys, I'll be hanged if I know how to Push. You said something about faster-than-light? I can't even run the mile in an hour."

"Of course you can Push," Talker assured him, hoping he was right. He knew what a Pusher's abilities were; but this one . . . "Just try it."

"Sure," Pusher agreed. "I'll probably wake up out of this, anyhow."

They sealed the ship for take-off while Pusher talked to himself.

"Funny," Pusher said. "I thought a camping trip would be a nice way to spend a furlough and all I do is get nightmares!"

Engine boosted the Ship into the air. The Walls were sealed and Eye was guiding them away from the planet.

"We're in clear space now," Talker said. Listening to Pusher, he hoped his mind hadn't cracked. "Eye and Thinker will give a direction, I'll transmit it to you, and you Push along it."

"You're crazy," Pusher mumbled. "You must have the wrong planet. I wish you nightmares would go away."

"You're in the Cooperation now," Talker said desperately. "There's the direction. Push!"

The Pusher didn't do anything for a moment. He was slowly emerging from his fantasy, realizing that he wasn't in a dream, after all. He felt the Cooperation. Eye to Thinker, Thinker to Talker, Talker to Pusher, all intercoordinated with Walls, and with each other.

"What is this?" Pusher asked. He felt the oneness of the Ship, the great warmth, the closeness achieved only in the Cooperation.

He Pushed.

Nothing happened.

"Try again," Talker begged.

PUSHER searched his mind. He found a deep well of doubt and fear. Staring into it, he saw his own tortured face.

Thinker illuminated it for him.

Pushers had lived with this doubt and fear for centuries. Pushers had fought through fear, killed through doubt.

That was where the Pusher organ was!

Martinson—specialist, Pusher—entered fully into the Crew, merged with them, threw mental arms around the shoulders of Thinker and Talker.

Suddenly, the Ship shot forward at eight times the speed of light. It continued to accelerate.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

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For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

THE BIRTH OF THE SPACE STATION (II)

LAST month, I told how the concept of the manned rocket in an orbital path around the Earth and its possible subsequent development into a space station was evolved and presented by Hermann Oberth in 1923. After that, very little happened for about six years and the

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reason was a popular book.

Oberth's original work, while not long, was very hard reading for practically everybody. There were pages upon pages of massed equations and the "clear text" which followed after such a discussion made very little sense unless you had waded through the mathematics preceding them.

Oberth was approached by his own publisher with the suggestion of writing a popular version of his work. He was not opposed to the idea in principle, as many other German scientists of that time would have been, but he did not have the time to write it. Once or twice, I believe, he actually started to, but each time a new and unsuspected and most interesting mathematical relationship turned up which, of course, had to be investigated first.

Then, one day, a professional writer came to Oberth, suggesting that they do the book in collaboration. Oberth was to supply the information and the writer—his name was Max Valier—was to do the writing.

IT did not work out well. Valier was not able to follow Oberth's mathematical reasoning on many points. He suggested "improvements." Oberth tried to explain why these suggestions, far from being improvements, would not work. Sometimes he convinced Valier, generally he did not, and he had to explain later that Valier's book was, after all, Valier's book and not his. His problem was that many other people began writing about "Oberth's ideas," but took their information from Valier.

As for the space station, Valier had not mentioned it at all. He had simply skipped that portion of Oberth's work. I am not sure whether he failed to understand the concept or just what prompted him. At any event, instead of discussing the space station concept, he described a base on the Moon. When I questioned him about that once, he declared that he could not see why anybody should bother to build a space station when we have a ready-made natural space station in the form of the Moon.

I tried to reason with him that hauling anything to the Moon is obviously much more difficult than hauling the same thing to a height of, say, 1000 miles and providing it with a lateral push so that it would take up an orbit and stay there.

Valier replied that hauling something to an orbit would require a velocity of about 5.5 miles per second (including air resistance and a safety factor) while hauling something to the Moon would require "just 1.5 miles per

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second more." ('Tain't so. Seven miles per second will merely get you through the Earth's gravitational field. Then you need additional fuel to brake your fall and to adapt to the orbital velocity of the Moon.) Furthermore, Valier insisted, you would have to haul "everything" to the space station's orbit, but only essentials to the Moon, where you could build what you need from raw materials to be found there. (Optimistic, to put it mildly.)

Still thinking I might win, I pointed out that if the primary purpose of a space station were to serve as a refueling place for interplanetary ships, a ship leaving from the station would have a speed of some 4.5 miles per second relative to the Earth, and would only have to make up the difference between 4.5 miles per second and the actual velocity required for the interplanetary trip, which would be some 8.5—9 miles per second relative to Earth. The moon, I then said, has an orbital velocity of only 0.6 miles per second and more than that is needed even to overcome its own gravitational field.

No go. Valier insisted that the raw material for fuel would be found on the Moon, too, so it would be unimportant that the Moon's orbital velocity is of no real help.

Since his answers were pat, while my own portion of the discussion came out slowly and gropingly, I feel sure that he had had the same discussion with Oberth before and had not been convinced. And since, as I have already said, people absorbed Oberth's ideas from Valier's book, there was no space station discussion for quite some time afterward.

THE first book largely devoted to the idea of the space station appeared in 1929. Its author was an Austrian by the name of Potocnic who wrote under the pen name of Herman Noordung. The title page of his book stated that he was an engineer and a captain in the reserve. To this day, I have failed to find out whether these two statements belonged together —meaning that he was a captain in the engineer corps—or whether one was his peacetime occupation and the other a wartime commission.

The title of the book was *Das Problem der Befahrung des Weltraums* ("The Problem of Travel in Space") and Potocnic-Noordung succeeded in getting himself into the bad graces of all the rocket men at once by producing a fantastic method for calculating overall efficiency. Another point on which he failed to make friends was his insistence that a space station should be located

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over the equator, 22,300 miles above mean sea level. At such a distance, the station would need precisely 24 hours to go around the Earth once. If it moved in an easterly direction, it would seem to stand still over one point of the equator.

For reasons I still don't understand, Potocnic-Noordung considered this a great advantage, though actually such a position would be full of drawbacks. The station could be seen from only one hemisphere, but it could also observe only one hemisphere. Because of the long distance—costly in fuel consumption—it could not even observe very well.

But he did have a number of interesting ideas. His proposed space station consisted of three units: the "living wheel" (as he called it), the "power house" and the "observatory."

The first was to be a wheel-shaped unit, about 100 feet in diameter, which was to spin around its hub so as to substitute centrifugal force for gravity around the rim. Of course the entrance was in the hub and he drew a diagram of a counter-rotating airlock for the hub.

Potocnic-Noordung also pointed out that there would be a slight difference in apparent gravity between the head and the feet of a man standing upright, and said that one would have to compensate for this while moving, especially if it came to vertical movements. He stated correctly that power could be had free from the Sun, by means of a condensing mirror and steam boiler pipe.

Along with these essentially correct thoughts, however, there ran a number of boners. For example, he wanted to spin the wheel so rapidly that the centrifugal force inside would be one full *g*. This would require one complete revolution in 8 seconds. Actually there is no need for one full *g* inside a space station, just as there is no need for sea-level air-pressure. Even untrained people are adaptable enough so that ⅓ *g* and about half-sea-level pressure (with a higher oxygen content) would be sufficient. This would cut down the number of revolutions per minute required and lighten the whole structure very considerably.

ANOTHER of Potocnic-Noordung's misconceptions I always look at with a smile is the design of his windows. They are slightly convex lenses and many of the windows are also equipped with a plane mirror in a frame on the outside, adjusted to reflect additional sunlight into the interior of the station. What everybody forgot until recently is that people aren't cold-blooded and

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that the "heating device" for a spacesuit is the guy inside. In fact, these "heating devices" are so annoyingly efficient that the main worry of the modern space engineer is how to get rid of all the surplus heat.

The second unit, the "observatory," was not described in much detail. It was merely stated that it would be cylindrical, like a boiler, to maintain pressure inside and that it would contain all the astronomical instruments. It was not supposed to rotate, but was to be connected with the main station or "living wheel" by two electric cables and a flexible air hose. It was to be properly heated simply by piping air of the right temperature into it, while the power cables were to supply electricity for the instrumentation.

The third unit, the "power house," was mostly a large parabolic mirror with a set of boiler pipes along the focal line (the description grew more and more vague) and the current generated was to be supplied to the "living wheel" or else to be stored in storage batteries.

As regards the purpose of the whole space station, Potocnic-Noordung merely paraphrased Oberth: Earth observation, astronomical observation, possible warlike action by means of a solar mirror and possible storage of fuels for long distance trips.

During the same year, 1929, there appeared a series of articles on the space station concept by another author, Count Guido von Pirquet, then Secretary of the Austrian Society for Space Travel Research. The articles were published in the monthly journal *Die Rakete* ("The Rocket") of the German Society for Space Travel, usually abbreviated as VfR.

While Potocnic-Noordung had devoted a lot of attention to design detail and virtually none at all to the optimum orbit, von Pirquet did not say a word about design detail, but calculated carefully where his space station should be located and why. In the course of these calculations, von Pirquet discovered a fundamental fact which has often been quoted since:

You can't have space travel at all with chemical fuels unless you build a space station first.

A secondary but almost equally important discovery was that the building of the space station, the necessary first step, is also the most difficult.

Everything that comes afterward is simple, or almost-so, by comparison.

IT should be obvious by now that the various possible purposes of a space station are to some slight extent contradictory.

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From the point of view of fuel economy, the nearer the Earth, the better.

From the point of view of Earth observation, you also do generally better if you are close, but the limits are somewhat different. You don't want to be quite as close as you would like to be from the standpoint of uel economy.

From the point of view of refueling depot for long range trips, you may have trouble making up your mind. A "low" orbit will provide you with a higher orbital velocity, but a somewhat higher orbit might give you more room for maneuvering. The modern compromise orbit is the one advocated by Dr. Wernher von Braun — 1075 miles above sea level, which would produce a period of revolution around the Earth of precisely two hours.

Count von Pirquet solved this dilemma in a different way. Like Potocnic-Noordung, he advocated a three-unit station. But the three units were to run in three different orbits.

The one closest to Earth, the so-called Inner Station, was to revolve 470 miles above sea level with an orbital period of 100 minutes. The one farthest away, the so-called Outer Station, was to circle the Earth 3100 miles from the surface with an orbital period of 200 minutes. The third, or Transit Station, was to be on an elliptical orbit touching the other two orbits. Its distance from the surface would therefore vary from 470 to 3100 miles and its orbital period would be 150 minutes. When closely approaching either the Inner or the Outer Station, the velocity of the Transit Station would not match. There would be a velocity difference of about ¾ mile per second which would have to be adjusted for the men and materials to be transferred.

While the two statements at which von Pirquet arrived while working on the problem of the space station are still valid and correct, his suggestion for a station consisting of several units in different orbits has not borne any fruit.

AFTER the publication of these articles, there was another hiatus in the development of the space station concept, lasting longer than the first, about twenty years. But then a lot of people started work in earnest. A good many of the papers read at the Second International Congress for Astronautics in London, 1951, concerned one phase or another of the space station concept. Somewhat earlier, Wernher von Braun had published his concept in the book *Space Medicine;* a few months later, it was revised

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after prolonged discussions and published in its present form in the book *Across the Space Frontier*.

Needless to say that the various concepts published do not closely agree with each other, for there is room for a variety of opinions. Obviously the space station will look different if designer A assumes heating by solar radiation, something which is known and can be calculated right now, while designer B assumes that the atomic engineers will have come up with a useful small atomic reactor during the time it took the rocket engineers to produce a suitable cargo-carrying rocket to bring the space station's material up into an orbit.

Although we can predict a good deal of detail right now, some of this will be subject to change during the next decade. We can be sure of one thing only:

There will be a space station in the reasonably near future.

SLOWPOKE THOUGHT

I FORGET whether the villain drew his blaster with lightning speed or with the speed of light. No matter, for the worthy hero drew *his* with the speed of thought, so justice naturally triumphed.

This column being what it is, my readers will now expect me to tabulate the figures for these various speeds in kilometers or in miles per second. And that is just what I am going to do, not wasting any time with the well-known speed of light, but getting right down to the speed of thought.

We cannot actually measure the speed of a thought, but for this purpose we may consider thought a nerve impulse and we can measure that. If somebody drops a five-pound weight on your foot, you feel this "at once." This is not due to any fantastic speed of the nerve impulse, though, but merely to the fact that it is only about two yards from your foot to your brain.

As I said, the speed of such a nerve impulse can be measured, the main difficulty being simply that you deal with a relatively high speed over a short distance. Nothing organic which can be used for such experiments is very long. Consequently the figures found by the various experimenters differ somewhat.

The lowest figure I have seen reported was 40 meters (131 feet) per second, the highest 70 meters (226 feet) per second. That higher figure corresponds to 252 kilometers or 157 miles per hour.

In Germany, some 50 years ago, they used to say that the principle of the electric telegraph was easy to understand: just

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imagine a dachshund long enough to reach from one city to another. You step on its tail in Berlin and he'll bark in Hamburg. If we use that dachshund under American conditions, his tail ends at the Loop in Chicago while his head is at Times Square in New York.

Now let's translate that into neural speed.

A driver in Chicago carelessly rolls his car over the tail while hurrying out to the airport, which is some forty minutes of hard driving. While the driver fights for his reservation—"I did confirm it, Miss!"—the nerve impulse races through the long dachshund's nerve fibers, having just about passed Waterloo in Indiana when the DC-6 experimentally wags its ailerons prior to takeoff. Then there is a little delay because somebody else wants to land; the nerve impulse is still racing.

The DC-6 overtakes it in the general vicinity of Cleveland and lands at La Guardia airport while the nerve impulse is speeding somewhere to the north of Pittsburgh. The man who started it all in Chicago can wait for his baggage, stand in line for a taxi and have a leisurely meal in a restaurant on Times Square, waiting for the "bark" to arrive.

It does arrive—4 hours and 40 minutes after it was started.

All this is under the assumption that the speed of a nerve impulse actually is 70 meters per second. It may be as low as 40 meters per second, which amounts to just 90 miles per hour. Of course, inside the body, with a maximum distance of six feet to travel—14 feet in the case of a giraffe—90 mph serves as well as 150 mph and improving it to 300 mph, if that could be done, would probably not make any noticeable difference.

But when it comes to really long distances, pick something faster than the speed of a nerve impulse.

—WILLY LEY

ANY QUESTIONS?

I would like to know if you think that meteorite craters larger than Chubb Crater in Canada will be found on Earth.

Stephen Maran
500 St. John's Pl.
Brooklyn 16, N. Y.

I am convinced that craters of meteoric origin larger than Chubb Crater exist on Earth. In fact, there are several formations which are suspected of being just that.

One is Lake Bosumtvi in Ashantiland in Africa, only a few degrees from the equator. This perfectly circular lake has a diameter of six miles and the general geology of the area is

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such that meteoric origin is the easiest explanation for its existence.

Another suspected crater is the so-called Pretoria Salt Pan in South Africa, which has an even larger diameter—on the order of twenty miles.

So far, the meteoric origin of these formations has not been proved, but I understand that some work on the Pretoria Salt Pan is in progress. The problem, as you can see from the foregoing, is not the finding of larger formations that might be impact craters, but establishing proof that they actually are such.

In your article on the satellites of the Solar System (March 1952 GALAXY), you spoke of Pluto as being moonless.

Is this an established fact or an assumption because of lack of other evidence?

B. Rule
Haverford, Penna.

When I said that Pluto is "moonless," I meant, of course, that no moon of Pluto is known. Since Pluto has been under pretty intensive observation from the time of its discovery, the two statements "Pluto is moonless" and "no satellite of Pluto has been discovered so far" mean pretty nearly the same thing.

Are the large constellations in the skies, such as Leo, Orion, Ursus major and minor, etc., parts of our galaxy?

Alexander Bozic
9265 Shore Road
Brooklyn 9, N. Y.

Yes. The constellations you name, and all the others which could be listed, consist of stars that belong to our galaxy.

The only naked-eye object in the northern sky which does not belong to our galaxy is the so-called nebula in Andromeda which is the nearest *other* galaxy.

From the southern hemisphere, you can see two other objects which are not members of our galaxy—or only once removed—namely, the two Magellanic Clouds. They are clouds of stars outside our galaxy proper, but they are what some astronomers call "satellite galaxies," quite close to our own, as galactic distances go. I am not certain if it is known yet whether the Magellanic Clouds share the rotation of our galaxy, but I would expect them to do so.

Recently I heard (name deleted) say during a radio interview that the Flying Saucers originated from the star Wolf 359, about eight light-years away. What authority is there for mak-

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ing such a statement? Does Wolf 359 have a planetary system? Is there any other information on this star obtainable?

Arthur C. Eckstein
200 West 70th St.
New York City, N. Y.

Even if there were any evidence that the so-called Flying Saucers are visitors from another solar system, the star Wolf 359 is about the silliest possible choice. If it has been picked merely because it is not very far away (as measured in light-years), I don't see why the alleged experts did not settle for Alpha Centauri.

Alpha Centauri is only about half as far away as Wolf 359. It also is a big binary, both components of which are bright stars.

Little Wolf 359 is one of the faintest stars on record. Its absolute magnitude is 18.5 and if it were not so near, we wouldn't even know that it exists. The amount of energy emitted from its surface is just about 1/50,000th of that of our own sun—it would take fifty thousand of Wolf 359's caliber to make one Sol.

We don't know whether Little Wolfie has a planetary system, but with an energy output like that, its planets would be in a sorry plight. Naturally, an "expert" would use that as a reason for coming to our solar system—and one probably will.

IT'S FOR YOU!

The big news for us, of course, is the birth of BEYOND, the all-fantasy companion magazine to GALAXY. Since almost all writers of science fiction also enjoy writing fantasy, it seems reasonable that fantasy should appeal to almost all science fiction readers . . . and we have a power-lineup of stories in the first issue that should convince you that you will like fantasy:

. . . AND MY FEAR IS GREAT . . . is an eerily exciting novella with a full charge of the literary magic that Theodore Sturgeon is noted for.

It's aided by two sorcerer's journeymen novelets: BABEL II by Damon Knight, which brings a frightful Biblical incident clear up to date, and T. L. Sherred's EYE FOR INIQUITY, which proves that wishing can be profitable, though not necessarily fun, considering the complications; and a host of mesmeric short stories to help conjure up a stimulating new magazine that belongs right beside GALAXY on your library shelf and end-table.

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A Gleeb for Earth

By CHARLES SHAFHAUSER

Not to be or not to not be . . . that was the not-question for the invader of the not-world.

Illustrated by EMSH

DEAR Editor:

My 14 year old boy, Ronnie, is typing this letter for me because he can do it neater and use better grammar. I had to get in touch with somebody about this because if there is something to it, then somebody, everybody, is going to point finger at me, Ivan Smernda, and say, "Why didn't you warn us?"

I could not go to the police be-

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cause they are not too friendly to me because of some of my guests who frankly are stew bums. Also they might think I was on booze, too, or maybe the hops, and get my license revoked. I run a strictly legit hotel even though some of my guests might be down on their luck now and then.

What really got me mixed up in this was the mysterious disappearance of two of my guests. They both took a powder last Wednesday morning.

Now get this. In one room, that of Joe Binkle, which maybe is an alias, I find nothing but a suit of clothes, some butts and the letters I include here in same package. Binkle had only one suit. That I know. And this was it laying right in the middle of the room. Inside the coat was the vest, inside the vest the shirt, inside the shirt the underwear. The pants were up in the coat and inside of them was also the underwear. All this was buttoned up like Binkle had melted out of it and dripped through a crack in the floor. In a bureau drawer were the letters I told you about.

Now. In the room right under Binkle's lived another stew bum that checked in Thursday . . . name Ed Smith, alias maybe, too. This guy was a real case. He brought with him a big mirror with a heavy bronze frame. Airloom, he says. He pays a week in advance, staggers up the stairs to his room with the mirror and that's the last I see of him.

In Smith's room on Wednesday I find only a suit of clothes, the same suit he wore when he came in. In the coat the vest, in the vest the shirt, in the shirt the underwear. Also in the pants. Also all in the middle of the floor. Against the far wall stands the frame of the mirror. Only the frame!

WHAT a spot to be in! Now it might have been a gag. Sometimes these guys get funny ideas when they are on the stuff. But then I read the letters. This knocks me for a loop. They are all in different handwritings. All from different places. Stamps all legit, my kid says. India, China, England, everywhere.

My kid, he reads. He says it's no joke. He wants to call the cops or maybe some doctor. But I say no. He reads your magazine so he says write to you, send you the letters. You know what to do. Now you have them. Maybe you print. Whatever you do, Mr. Editor, remember my place, the Plaza Ritz Arms, is straight establishment. I don't drink. I never touch junk, not even aspirin.

Yours very truly,
Ivan Smernda

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Bombay, India
June 8

Mr. Joe Binkle
Plaza Ritz Arms
New York City
Dear Joe:

Greetings, greetings, greetings. Hold firm in your wretched projection, for tomorrow you will not be alone in the not-world. In two days I, Glmpauszn, will be born.

Today I hang in our newly developed not-pod just within the mirror gateway, torn with the agony that we calculated must go with such tremendous wavelength fluctuations. I have attuned myself to a fetus within the body of a not-woman in the not-world. Already I am static and for hours have looked into this weird extension of the Universe with fear and trepidation.

As soon as my stasis was achieved, I tried to contact you, but got no response. What could have diminished your powers of articulate wave interaction to make you incapable of receiving my messages and returning them? My wave went out to yours and found it, barely pulsing and surrounded with an impregnable chimera.

Quickly, from the not-world vibrations about you, I learned the not-knowledge of your location. So I must communicate with you by what the not-world calls "mail" till we meet. For this purpose I must utilize the feeble vibrations of various not-people through whose inadequate articulation I will attempt to make my moves known to you. Each time I will pick a city other than the one I am in at the time.

I, Glmpauszn, come equipped with powers evolved from your fragmentary reports before you ceased to vibrate to us and with a vast treasury of facts from indirect sources. Soon our tortured people will be free of the fearsome not-folk and I will be their liberator. You failed in your task, but I will try to get you off with light punishment when we return again.

The hand that writes this letter is that of a boy in the not-city of Bombay in the not-country of India. He does not know he writes it. Tomorrow it will be someone else. You must never know of my exact location, for the not-people might have access to the information.

I must leave off now because the not-child is about to be born. When it is alone in the room, it will be spirited away and I will spring from the pod on the gateway into its crib and will be its exact vibrational likeness.

I have tremendous powers. But the not-people must never know I am among them. This is the only way I could arrive in the room where the gateway lies

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without arousing suspicion. I will grow up as the not-child in order that I might destroy the not-people completely.

All is well, only they shot this information file into my matrix too fast. I'm having a hard time sorting facts and make the right decision. Gezsltrysk, what a task!

Farewell till later.

Glmpauszn

Wichita, Kansas
June 13

Dear Joe:

Mnghjkl, fhfjgfhjklop phelnoprausynks. No. When I communicate with you, I see I must avoid those complexities of procedure for which there are no terms in this language. There is no way of describing to you in not-language what I had to go through during the first moments of my birth.

Now I know what difficulties you must have had with your limited equipment. These not-people are unpredictable and strange. Their doctor came in and weighed me again the day after my birth. Consternation reigned when it was discovered I was ten pounds heavier. What difference could it possibly make? Many doctors then came in to see me. As they arrived hourly, they found me heavier and heavier. Naturally, since I am growing. This is part of my instructions. My not-mother (Gezsltrysk!) then burst into tears. The doctors conferred, threw up their hands and left.

I learned the following day that the opposite component of my not-mother, my not-father, had been away riding on some conveyance during my birth. He was out on . . . what did they call it? Oh, yes, a bender. He did not arrive till three days after I was born.

When I heard them say that he was straightening up to come see me, I made a special effort and grew marvelously in one afternoon. I was 36 not-world inches tall by evening. My not-father entered while I was standing by the crib examining a syringe the doctor had left behind. He stopped in his tracks on entering the room and seemed incapable of speech.

Dredging into the treasury of knowledge I had come equipped with, I produced the proper phrase for occasions of this kind in the not-world.

"Poppa," I said.

This was the first use I had made of the so-called vocal cords that are now part of my extended matrix. The sound I emitted sounded low-pitched, guttural and penetrating even to myself. It must have jarred on my not-father's ears, for he turned and ran shouting from the room.

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They apprehended him on the stairs and I heard him babble something about my being a monster and no child of his. My not-mother appeared at the doorway and instead of being pleased at the progress of my growth, she fell down heavily. She made a distinct *thump* on the floor.

This brought the rest of them on the run, so I climbed out the window and retreated across a nearby field. A prolonged search was launched, but I eluded them. What unpredictable beings!

I reported my tremendous progress back to our world, including the cleverness by which I managed to escape my pursuers. I received a reply from Blgftury which, on careful analysis, seems to be small praise indeed. In fact, some of his phrases apparently contain veiled threats. But you know old Blgftury. He wanted to go on this expedition himself and it's his nature never to flatter anyone.

From now on I will refer to not-people simply as people, dropping the qualifying preface except where comparisons must be made between this alleged world and our own. It is merely an offshoot of our primitive mythology when this was considered a spirit world, just as these people refer to our world as never-never land and other anomalies. But we learned otherwise, while they never have.

New sensations crowd into my consciousness and I am having a hard time classifying them. Anyway, I shall carry on swiftly now to the inevitable climax in which I singlehanded will obliterate the terror of the not-world and return to our world a hero. I cannot understand your not replying to my letters. I have given you a box number. What could have happened to your vibrations?

Glmpauszn

Albuquerque, New Mexico
June 15

Dear Joe:

I had tremendous difficulty getting a letter off to you this time. My process—original with myself, by the way—is to send out feeler vibrations for what these people call the psychic individual. Then I establish contact with him while he sleeps and compel him without his knowledge to translate my ideas into written language. He writes my letter and mails it to you. Of course, he has no awareness of what he has done.

My first five tries were unfortunate. Each time I took control of an individual who could not read or write! Finally I found my man, but I fear his words are limited. Ah, well. I had great things to tell you about my prog-

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ress, but I cannot convey even a hint of how I have accomplished these miracles through the thick skull of this incompetent.

In simple terms then: I crept into a cave and slipped into a kind of sleep, directing my squhjkl ulytz & uhrytzg . . . no, it won't come out. Anyway, I grew overnight to the size of an average person here.

As I said before, floods of impressions are driving into my xzbyl . . . my brain . . . from various nerve and sense areas and I am having a hard time classifying them. My one idea was to get to a chemist and acquire the stuff needed for the destruction of these people.

Sunrise came as I expected. According to my catalog of information, the impressions aroused by it are of beauty. It took little conditioning for me finally to react in this manner. This is truly an efficient mechanism I inhabit.

I gazed about me at the mixture of lights, forms and impressions. It was strange and . . . now I know . . . beautiful. However, I hurried immediately toward the nearest chemist. At the same time I looked up and all about me at the beauty.

Soon an individual approached. I knew what to do from my information. I simply acted natural. You know, one of your earliest instructions was to realize that these people see nothing unusual in you if you do not let yourself believe they do.

This individual I classified as a female of a singular variety here. Her hair was short, her upper torso clad in a woolen garment. She wore . . . what are they? . . . oh, yes, sneakers. My attention was diverted by a scream as I passed her. I stopped.

The woman gesticulated and continued to scream. People hurried from nearby houses. I linked my hands behind me and watched the scene with an attitude of mild interest. They weren't interested in me, I told myself. But they were.

I became alarmed, dived into a bush and used a mechanism that you unfortunately do not have—invisibility. I lay there and listened.

"He was stark naked," the girl with the sneakers said.

A figure I recognized as a police officer spoke to her.

"Lizzy, you'll just have to keep these crackpot friends of yours out of this area."

"But—"

"No more buck-bathing, Lizzy," the officer ordered. "No more speeches in the Square. Not when it results in riots at five in the morning. Now where is your naked friend? I'm going to make an example of him."

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That was it—I had forgotten clothes. There is only one answer to this oversight on my part. My mind is confused by the barrage of impressions that assault it. I must retire now and get them all classified. Beauty, pain, fear, hate, love, laughter. I don't know one from the other. I must feel each, become accustomed to it.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that the information I have been given is very unrealistic. You have been inefficient, Joe. What will Blgftury and the others say of this? My great mission is impaired. Farewell, till I find a more intelligent mind so I can write you with more enlightenment.

Glmpauszn

Moscow, Idaho
June 17

Dear Joe:

I received your first communication today. It baffles me. Do you greet me in the proper fringe-zone manner? No. Do you express joy, hope, pride, helpfulness at my arrival? No. You ask me for a loan of five bucks!

It took me some time, culling my information catalog to come up with the correct variant of the slang term "buck." Is it possible that you are powerless even to provide yourself with the wherewithal to live in this inferior world?

A reminder, please. You and I —I in particular—are now engaged in a struggle to free our world from the terrible, maiming intrusions of this not-world. Through many long gleebs, our people have lived a semi-terrorized existence while errant vibrations from this world ripped across the closely joined vibration flux, whose individual fluctuations make up our sentient population.

Even our eminent, all-high Frequency himself has often been jeopardized by these people. The not-world and our world are like two baskets as you and I see them in our present forms. Baskets woven with the greatest intricacy, design and color; but baskets whose convex sides are joined by a thin fringe of filaments. Our world, on the vibrational plane, extends just a bit into this, the not-world. But being a world of higher vibration, it is ultimately tenuous to these gross peoples. While we vibrate only within a restricted plane because of our purer, more stable existence, these people radiate widely into our world.

They even send what they call psychic reproductions of their own selves into ours. And most infamous of all, they sometimes are able to force some of our individuals over the fringe into their world temporarily, causing them

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much agony and fright.

The latter atrocity is perpetrated through what these people call mediums, spiritualists and other fatuous names. I intend to visit one of them at the first opportunity to see for myself.

Meanwhile, as to you, I would offer a few words of advice. I picked them up while examining the "slang" portion of my information catalog which you unfortunately caused me to use. So, for the ultimate cause—in this, the penultimate adventure, and for the glory and peace of our world — shake a leg, bub. Straighten up and fly right. In short, get hep.

As far as the five bucks is concerned, no dice.

Glmpauszn

Des Moines, Iowa
June 19

Dear Joe:

Your letter was imponderable till I had thrashed through long passages in my information catalog that I had never imagined I would need. Biological functions and bodily processes which are labeled here "revolting" are used freely in your missive. You can be sure they are all being forwarded to Blgftury. If I were not involved in the most important part of my journey—completion of the weapon against the not-worlders—I would come to New York immediately. You would rue that day, I assure you.

Glmpauszn

Boise, Idaho
July 15

Dear Joe:

A great deal has happened to me since I wrote to you last. Systematically, I have tested each emotion and sensation listed in our catalog. I have been, as has been said in this world, like a reed bending before the winds of passion. In fact, I'm rather badly bent indeed. Ah! You'll pardon me, but I just took time for what is known quaintly in this tongue as a "hooker of red-eye" Ha! I've mastered even the vagaries of slang in the not-language . . . Ahhh! Pardon me again. I feel much better now.

You see, Joe, as I attuned myself to the various impressions that constantly assaulted my mind through this body, I conditioned myself to react exactly as our information catalog instructed me to.

Now it is all automatic, pure reflex. A sensation comes to me when I am burned; then I experience a burning pain. If the sensation is a tickle, I experience a tickle.

This morning I have what is known medically as a syndrome . . . a group of symptoms popularly referred to as a hangover

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. . . Ahhh! Pardon me again. Strangely . . . now what was I saying? Oh, yes. Ha, ha. Strangely enough, the reactions that come easiest to the people in this world came most difficult to me. Money-love, for example. It is a great thing here, both among those who haven't got it and those who have.

I went out and got plenty of money. I walked invisible into a bank and carried away piles of it. Then I sat and looked at it. I took the money to a remote room of the twenty room suite I have rented in the best hotel here in—no, sorry—and stared at it for hours.

Nothing happened. I didn't love the stuff or feel one way or the other about it. Yet all around me people are actually killing one another for the love of it.

Anyway . . . Ahhh. Pardon me. I got myself enough money to fill ten or fifteen rooms. By the end of the week I should have all eighteen spare rooms filled with money. If I don't love it then, I'll feel I have failed. This alcohol is taking effect now.

Blgftury has been goading me for reports. To hell with his reports! I've got a lot more emotions to try, such as romantic love. I've been studying this phenomenon, along with other racial characteristics of these people, in the movies. This is the best place to see these people as they really are. They all go into the movie houses and there do homage to their own images. Very quaint type of idolatry.

Love. Ha! What an adventure this is becoming.

By the way, Joe, I'm forwarding that five dollars. You see, it won't cost me anything. It'll come out of the pocket of the idiot who's writing this letter. Pretty shrewd of me, eh?

I'm going out and look at that money again. I think I'm at last learning to love it, though not as much as I admire liquor. Well, one simply must persevere, I always say.

Glmpauszn

Penobscot, Maine
July 20

Dear Joe:

Now you tell me not to drink alcohol. Why not? You never mentioned it in any of your vibrations to us, gleebs ago, when you first came across to this world. It will stint my powers? Nonsense! Already I have had a quart of the liquid today. I feel wonderful. Get that? I actually feel wonderful, in spite of this miserable imitation of a body.

There are long hours during which I am so well-integrated into this body and this world that I almost consider myself a member of it. Now I can function

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efficiently. I sent Blgftury some long reports today outlining my experiments in the realm of chemistry where we must finally defeat these people. Of course, I haven't made the experiments yet, but I will. This is not deceit, merely realistic anticipation of the inevitable. Anyway, what the old xbyzrt doesn't know won't muss his vibrations.

I went to what they call a nightclub here and picked out a blonde-haired woman, the kind that the books say men prefer. She was attracted to me instantly. After all, the body I have devised is perfect in every detail . . . actually a not-world ideal.

I didn't lose any time overwhelming her susceptibilities. I remember distinctly that just as I stooped to pick up a large roll of money I had dropped, her eyes met mine and in them I could see her admiration. We went to my suite and I showed her one of the money rooms. Would you believe it? She actually took off her shoes and ran around through the money in her bare feet! Then we kissed.

Concealed in the dermis of the lips are tiny, highly sensitized nerve ends which send sensations to the brain. The brain interprets these impulses in a certain manner. As a result, the rate of secretion in the adrenals on the ends of the kidneys increases and an enlivening of the entire endocrine system follows. Thus I felt the beginnings of love.

I sat her down on a pile of money and kissed her again. Again the tingling, again the secretion and activation. I integrated myself quickly.

Now in all the motion pictures —true representations of life and love in this world—the man with a lot of money or virtue kisses the girl and tries to induce her to do something biological. She then refuses. This pleases both of them, for he wanted her to refuse. She, in turn, wanted him to want her, but also wanted to prevent him so that he would have a high opinion of her. Do I make myself clear?

I kissed the blonde girl and gave her to understand what I then wanted. Well, you can imagine my surprise when she said yes! So I had failed. I had not found love.

I became so abstracted by this problem that the blonde girl fell asleep. I thoughtfully drank quantities of excellent alcohol called gin and didn't even notice when the blonde girl left.

I am now beginning to feel the effects of this alcohol again. Ha. Don't I wish old Blgftury were here in the vibrational pattern of an olive? I'd get the blonde in and have her eat him out of a Martini. That is a gin mixture.

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I think I'll get a hot report off to the old so-and-so right now. It'll take him a gleeb to figure this one out. I'll tell him I'm setting up an atomic reactor in the sewage systems here and that all we have to do is activate it and all the not-people will die of chain asphyxiation.

Boy, what an easy job this turned out to be. It's just a vacation. Joe, you old gold-bricker, imagine you here all these gleebs living off the fat of the land. Yak, yak. Affectionately.

Glmpauszn

Sacramento, Calif.
July 25

Dear Joe:

All is lost unless we work swiftly. I received your revealing letter the morning after having a terrible experience of my own. I drank a lot of gin for two days and then decided to go to one of these seance things.

Somewhere along the way I picked up a red-headed girl. When we got to the darkened seance room, I took the redhead into a corner and continued my investigations into the realm of love. I failed again because she said yes immediately.

The nerves of my dermis were working over time when suddenly I had the most frightening experience of my life. Now I know what a horror these people really are to our world.

The medium had turned out all the lights. He said there was a strong psychic influence in the room somewhere. That was me, of course, but I was too busy with the redhead to notice.

Anyway, Mrs. Somebody wanted to make contact with her paternal grandmother, Lucy, from the beyond. The medium went into his act. He concentrated and sweated and suddenly something began to take form in the room. The best way to describe it in not-world language is a white, shapeless cascade of light.

Mrs. Somebody reared to her feet and screeched, "Grandma Lucy!" Then I really took notice.

Grandma Lucy, nothing! This medium had actually brought Blgftury partially across the vibration barrier. He must have been vibrating in the fringe area and got caught in the works. Did he look mad! His zyhku was open and his btgrimms were down.

Worst of all, he saw me. Looked right at me with an unbelievable pattern of pain, anger, fear and amazement in his matrix. Me and the redhead.

Then comes your letter today telling of the fate that befell you as a result of drinking alcohol. Our wrenchingly attuned faculties in these not-world bodies

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need the loathsome drug to escape from the reality of not-reality. It's true. I cannot do without it now. The day is only half over and I have consumed a quart and a half. And it is dulling all my powers as it has practically obliterated yours. I can't even become invisible any more.

I must find the formu! chat will wipe out the not-wor . men quickly.

Quickly!

Glmpauszn

Florence, Italy
September 10

Dear Joe:

This telepathic control becomes more difficult every time. I must pick closer points of communication soon. I have nothing to report but failure. I bought a ton of equipment and went to work on the formula that is half complete in my instructions. Six of my hotel rooms were filled with tubes, pipes and apparatus of all kinds.

I had got my mechanism as close to perfect as possible when I realized that, in my befuddled condition, I had set off a reaction that inevitably would result in an explosion. I had to leave there immediately, but I could not create suspicion. The management was not aware of the nature of my activities.

I moved swiftly. I could not afford time to bring my baggage. I stuffed as much money into my pockets as I could and then sauntered into the hotel lobby. Assuming my most casual air, I told the manager I was checking out. Naturally he was stunned since I was his best customer.

"But why, sir?" he asked plaintively.

I was baffled. What could I tell him?

"Don't you like the rooms?" he persisted. "Isn't the service good?"

"It's the rooms," I told him. "They're—they're—"

"They're what?" he wanted to know.

"They're not safe."

"Not safe? But that is ridiculous. This hotel is . . ."

At this point the blast came. My nerves were a wreck from the alcohol.

"See?" I screamed. "Not safe. I knew they were going to blow up!"

He stood paralyzed as I ran from the lobby. Oh, well, never say die. Another day, another hotel. I swear I'm even beginning to think like the not-men, curse them.

Glmpauszn

Rochester, New York
September 25

Dear Joe:

I have it! It is done! In spite

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of the alcohol, in spite of Blgftury's niggling criticism, I have succeeded. I now have developed a form of mold, somewhat similar to the antibiotics of this world, that, transmitted to the human organism, will cause a disease whose end will be swift and fatal.

First the brain will dissolve and then the body will fall apart. Nothing in this world can stop the spread of it once it is loose. Absolutely nothing.

We must use care. Stock in as much gin as you are able. I will bring with me all that I can. Meanwhile I must return to my original place of birth into this world of horrors. There I will secure the gateway, a large mirror, the vibrational point at which we shall meet and slowly climb the frequency scale to emerge into our own beautiful, now secure world. You and I together, Joe, conquerors, liberators.

You say you eat little and drink as much as you can. The same with me. Even in this revolting world I am a sad sight. My not-world senses falter. This is the last letter. Tomorrow I come with the gateway. When the gin is gone, we will plant the mold in the hotel where you live.

In only a single gleeb it will begin to work. The men of this queer world will be no more. But we can't say we didn't have some fun, can we, Joe?

And just let Blgftury make one crack. Just one xyzprlt. I'll have hgutry before the ghjdksla!

Glmpauszn

Dear Editor:

These guys might be queer drunk hopheads. But if not? If soon brain dissolve, body fall apart, how long have we got? Please, anybody who knows answer, write to me—Ivan Smernda, Plaza Ritz Arms—how long is a gleeb?

—CHARLES SCHAFHAUSER

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NOT FIT FOR CHILDREN

By EVELYN E. SMITH

Trading with the natives was like taking candy from a kid —but which were the natives?

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

PPON lowered himself hastily to the orlop and ran toward me. "Hurry up, Qan!" he projected on a sublevel, trying to escape my mother's consciousness. "They're coming! All the others are up already."

"Who's coming?" my mother wanted to know, but her full interest was absorbed by her work, and she gave us only the side of her mind. "You youngsters really must learn to think clearly."

"Yes'm." Ppon projected suitable youthful embarrassment, but on a lower level he was giggling. Later I must give him another

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warning; we young ones could not yet separate the thought channels efficiently, so it was more expedient not to try.

"The *zkuchi* are coming," I lied glibly, knowing that the old ones accept inanity as merely a sign of immaturity, "on hundreds of golden wings that beat faster than light."

Grandfather removed a part of his mind from his beloved work. "The *zkuchi* are purely mythological creatures," he thought crossly. "You're old enough to know better than that . . . Qana," he appealed to my mother, "why do you let him believe in such nonsense?"

"The *zkuchi* are part of our cultural heritage, Father," she projected gently. "We must not let the young ones forget our heritage. Particularly if we are to be here for some time."

"It seems to me you're unnecessarily pessimistic," he complained. "You know I've never failed you yet. We shall get back, I promise you. It's just that the transmutation takes time."

"But it's taken such a long time already," she thought sadly. "Sometimes I begin to have doubts." Then she apparently remembered that serious matters should not be discussed before us young ones. As if we didn't know what was going on. "Run along and play, children," she advised, "but don't forget to check the atmosphere first."

Grandfather started to excogitate something about how it would be better if Ppon went and helped his father while I stayed and did my lessons—you never seem to escape from lessons anywhere in the Universe—but we got away before he could finish.

TOPSIDE, the others were jumping up and down in their excitement. Ztul, the half-wit, was so upset he actually *spoke*: "Hurry, Qan, the tourists are coming!"

"Ztul, you must never, *never* make words aloud!" I thought fiercely. "The old ones might hear and find out about the game."

"It's a harmless game," Ppon contributed. "And useful, too. Your grandfather needs the stuff."

"Yes," I agreed, "but perhaps the old ones wouldn't see it that way. They might even stop the game. Adults have funny ideas, and there's no use asking for trouble."

There was a chorus of assenting thought from the others. All of us had our family troubles.

We got to work. Quickly we arranged the interiors of the shelters which we had cleverly built out of materials borrowed from below when the old ones' perceptions were directed elsewhere. The

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essential structure of the materials had not been changed and could easily be replaced when the time came, but there was no use having to give involved explanations. The old ones never seemed to understand anything.

At first we had just built the shelters as play huts, but when the first tourists had misunderstood, we had improved upon the original misconception. Now we had a regular street full of rude dwellings. Lucky for us the old ones never came topside.

As the little spaceship landed, Ppon and I and four of the others were ready at its door to form a welcoming committee. The rest dispersed to play villagers. The others took turns alternating the two roles, but I, of course, was always leader. After all, I'd made up the game.

Two members of the crew dropped lightly out of the ship and slid a ramp into place. Then the passengers—there was a sizable group this time, I noted with satisfaction—came, followed by Sam, the guide, a grizzled old human. He grinned at us. We were old friends, for he'd been leading these tours for ten of their Earth years.

The passengers stopped at the foot of the ramp and Sam ran forward to face them. By now we were used to the appearance of the human beings—small, binocular, with smooth, pasty skins—although they had really frightened us when we first laid eyes on them.

"NOW, you see, folks," Sam bellowed through his megaphone, "the scientists don't know everything. They said life could not exist out here in the Asteroid Belt—and, behold, life! They said these little planets were too small, had too little gravity to hold an atmosphere. But you just breathe in that air, as pure and fresh and clean as the atmosphere of our own Earth! Speaking of gravity, you'll notice that we're walking, not floating. Matter of fact, you'll notice it's even a little hard to walk; you seem a bit heavier than at home. And they said there would be hardly any gravity. No, folks, those scientists know a lot of things, I won't deny that, but they sure don't know everything."

"Amazing!" a small, bespectacled male passenger said. "I can hardly believe my own senses!"

"Watch out for him," Ppon projected to me. "I think he's a scientist of some kind."

"Don't teach your ancestor to levitate," I conceptualized back.

Of course what struck the passengers first was neither the atmosphere nor the gravity; it was us. They never failed to be sur-

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prised, although the travel folders should have shown them what to expect. One of the folders had a picture of me, amusingly crude and two-dimensional, it's true, but not entirely unflattering. I'm not really purple, just a sort of tender fuchsia, but what could you expect from the rudimentary color processes they used? Sam had let me have the original and I always wished I could show it to Mother, but I couldn't without having to explain where it had come from.

"They're so cute!" a thin female screamed. "Almost like big squirrels, really, except for all those arms." Her teeth protruded more than those of the small rodent she was thinking about, or than mine, for that matter.

"Be careful, ma'am," the guide warned her. "They speak English."

"They do? How clever of them. Why, they must be quite intelligent, then."

"They are of a pretty high order of intelligence," the guide agreed, "although their methods of reasoning have always baffled scientists. Somehow they seem to *sense* scientists, think of them as their enemies, and just clam up entirely."

"I think they're just simply too cute," she said, gazing at me fondly.

"Ah, *srrk* yourself, madam," I excogitated, confident that humans were non-telepathic.

SHE looked a little disturbed, though; I'd better watch myself. After all, as leader I had to set a good example.

"This here is Qan," the guide introduced me. "Headman or chief or something of the tribe. He is always on hand to greet us."

"Welcome, travelers from a distant star," I intoned, wrapping my mother's second-best cloak more impressively about me, "to the humble land of the *Gchi*. Come in peace, go in peace."

"Why, he speaks excellent English," the scientist exclaimed.

"They pick up things very fast," Sam explained.

"Natives can be very, very shrewd," a stout female commented, clutching her handbag tightly.

"And now," Sam said, "we will visit the rude dwellings of this simple, primitive, but hospitable people."

"*People!*" Ppon projected. "You better mind your language, Buster! People, indeed!"

"Our friend Qan will lead the way." Sam waved toward me.

I smiled back at him, but didn't move.

"Whatsa matter?" he hissed. "Don't you trust me? Your old pal Sam?"

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"No," I whispered back. "Last time I let you pay me at the end of the tour, the take was $3.75 short."

He tried another tack. "But look, Qan, it's a hell of a job getting all those coins together. Why can't you take paper money instead?"

"What good would paper money do me up here?"

"What I can't figure out is what good the metal does you up here, either."

I beamed. "We eat it."

Muttering to himself, he walked over to the ship and called one of the crewmen. They dragged a bag out of the ship's hold. Puffing, they laid it at my feet. I tossed it to Ztul.

"Count it," I ordered out loud, "and if there's any missing, no one leaves this planet alive." I snarled ferociously.

Everybody laughed. It was part of the act.

"You will notice," Sam announced as we led the way down the street, "that the *Gchi* are all about the same size. No young ones among them. We don't know whether this is because they reproduce differently from us, or because they have concealed their offspring."

"The children must be dear little creatures," the toothy female gushed. "If even the adults are cute when they're seven or eight feet tall, the little ones must be simply precious . . . Tell me, Chief, do you have any children?"

"Don't understand," I grunted. "Concept unfamiliar. Not know what children is."

"Funny," remarked the scientist, "he was speaking perfectly good English before."

"Watch yourself, kid," Ppon ideated warningly to me.

"Children are . . ." she began and stopped. "They're—well, how do you reproduce?"

PPON, the *oosh*-head, took it upon himself to answer. "If you'll just step into my hut, madam, I'll be delighted to show you."

"If you ask me," the scientist stated, "these are frauds."

"Whaddya mean frauds?" Sam demanded indignantly.

"Human beings dressed up as extraterrestrials. They speak too good an English. Their concepts are too much like ours. Their sense of humor is equally vul—too similar."

"You and your big mouth!" I projected to Ppon.

"Look who's thinking!" he excogitated back. I could see I'd have to give him a mind-lashing later.

It was up to me to save the situation. "If you would like to examine me more closely, sir," I

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addressed the scientist, "you will see that I am not a human being."

He approached me dubiously.

"Closer," I said, looking him in the eye, as I bared my teeth and growled. "I have five eyes, sir, and you will notice that I am looking at you with each one of them. I have seven arms, sir—" here I reached out to grab him "—and you will notice that they are all living tissue."

"No, you couldn't be a human being," he agreed, backing away as soon as I released my grip, "but the whole thing is . . . odd. Very odd."

"If anthropologists on Earth can't explain all the customs of the primitives there," Sam tried to placate him, "how can we explain the behavior of extraterrestrials? Let's go into some of the houses. The chief has kindly given us his permission to look around."

"Our houses are your houses," I stated, bowing graciously.

As always, the tourists grew extremely enthusiastic about the furniture in our simple dwellings. "What lovely — er — things you have," squirrel-tooth commented. "What are they used for?"

"Well, the *pryu* is for the *mrach,* of course," I explained glibly, "and the *wrooov* is much used for *cvrking* the *budz,* although the *ywrl* is preferred by the less discriminating.

"Oh," she said. "How I should love to have one of the—'*wroov*' I think it was you said, for my very own. I wonder whether . . ."

By a curious coincidence, Hsoj arrived at this point, carrying a tray full of things and stuff.

"Artifacts!" he shouted. "Nice artifacts! Who wants to buy artifacts?"

ALL the tourists did. They were pretty good artifacts, if I do say so myself. I'd made them out of the junk I rescued from our dustbins before the disintegration unit got to work. Honestly, I can't understand how the old ones can complain about our being wasteful and then go and throw away all sorts of perfectly useful things.

"You must pay the natives in metal," the guide explained. "They accept only coins."

"Why?" the stout female wanted to know. "Do they really eat metal?"

"I doubt it. One of them ate a couple of pounds of Earth candy a tourist gave him last time and he seemed to enjoy it without ill effects."

"Without ill effects!" Ppon excogitated. "You should have seen Ztul afterward, boy!"

"Look, Mac." A short fat human offered Hsoj a small silver coin and then five larger brown

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ones. "Which would you rather have?"

"Them." Hsoj pointed unhesitatingly to the brown coins.

A smile rippled covertly through the tourists.

"They're a simple and childlike people, but really so good-natured," Sam footnoted.

All of us gave simple good-natured smiles as Hsoj accepted the gift of the brown coins.

"Keep up the good work," I projected. "We can use all the copper we can get."

"You like metal, dear?" a female asked Hsoj. She unfastened a belt from around her waist. "Would you take this in exchange for some of your pretty things?"

"Say 'yes,' " I conceptualized. "That's steel. Old and worthless to her, but not to us."

"I know, I know," Hsoj ideated impatiently. "What makes you think you're the only one who knows anything?"

Never had we got such a big haul before, because everybody seemed to have all sorts of metal stuff on him that he valued less than coins.

Now came the sad part of the spiel. "Remember, folks, these simple, honest individuals you see before you are but the scanty remnants of a once-proud race who spanned the skies. For their ancestors must have been godlike indeed to have erected such edifices as that commanding structure over there." Sam pointed to the portable atmosphere machine which was set up several *yebil* away to give our playground proper air. "Once glorious, now fallen into ruin and decay."

"You're going to catch *muh* from the old ones," Ppon ideated, "when they find out you haven't been keeping the machine clean."

"Don't be a silly *oosh*," I thought back with a mental grin. "I'm using the atmosphere machine to create atmosphere."

"You're getting to be as stupid as a human," he thought in disgust.

"May we go inside?" the scientific passenger asked Sam.

"No, indeed," I said hastily. "It is our temple, sacred to the gods. No unbeliever may set foot in it."

"What are the basic tenets of your religion?" the scientist wanted to know.

"We do not talk about it," I said with dignity. "It is tabu. Bad form."

"AND now," announced the guide, glancing at his watch, "we have just time for the war dance before we leave for Vesta."

"Against whom are they planning a war?" asked a small passenger, turning pale.

"It's a vestigial ritual," Sam

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explained quickly, "dating back to the days when there were other —er—when there was somebody to fight. Just an invocation to the gods . . . general stuff like that . . . nothing to be afraid of. Isn't it so, Qan?"

"Quite so," I replied, folding all my arms across my mother's cloak. "Come in peace, go in peace. Our motto."

We started the dance. It wouldn't have got us a passing mark in first grade, where we'd learned it *rffi* ago, but our version of the dance of the *zkuchi* was plenty good enough for the tourists.

"If I ever visit Earth, *Janna* forbid," I thought to Ppon as we executed an intricate caracole, "I'm going to wear earplugs all the time."

The dance finished.

"Now everybody get together!" Sam shouted, clapping his hands to round up his charges. "We are about to leave little *Gchik*."

"He should only know what *gchik* means," Ppon sniggered mentally.

"Little *Gchik* is barren, dying, its past glories all but forgotten," Sam almost sobbed, "but still its simple, warm-hearted inhabitants carry on bravely . . ."

"Couldn't we *do* something for them?" suggested the stout female.

Everybody murmured assent. This contingency arose all too often—a result of our being just too lovable.

"No one can help us," I said in a deep voice, pulling the cloak over my face. The *idzik* feathers trimming it tickled like crazy. "We must dree our own weird alone. Besides, the air of *Gchik* has a deleterious effect upon human beings if they're exposed to it for longer than four hours."

There was a mad scramble to reach the ship.

"Stand by the atmosphere machine, Hsoj," I instructed, "to poison a little air in case anybody wants to take a sample."

The scientist actually did, in a little bottle he seemed to have brought along for the purpose; but he got off the "asteroid" as rapidly as the rest of them, after that.

We watched the spaceship dwindle to a silver mote in the distance.

"Whew," Ppon thought, sinking to the surface. "That war dance sure takes a lot out of a fellow."

THEN he conceptualized indignantly as he—as well as the rest of us—floated off the top level. "Somebody's cut the gravity!"

"Must be Grandfather," I mentalized. "I suppose he thinks we've been out long enough, so he's warning us, just as if we

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were a bunch of infants. I guess we'd better go inside, though. Let's not forget to turn off the atmosphere, fellows. It uses too much energy and the old ones won't let us play topside any more."

"You know everything, don't you, Qan?" Ppon sneered.

I ignored him. "Pretty good haul," I excogitated as I hefted the bags of metal. "Here, Ztul, catch!"

"You always make me carry everything!" he complained.

Grandfather caught us as we lowered ourselves from the airlock. I figured he must have been getting suspicious or otherwise he'd never have left his beloved engines.

"What's this you youngsters have?" he wanted to know, pouncing on our bags. "Metal, eh? I suppose you were going to make another fake meteorite out of it for me, were you?"

"I thought you wanted metal, Grandfather," I sulked. He could have been more appreciative.

"Certainly I want metal. You know I need it to get the drive working again. But what I want to know is where you got it from. I'd think you stole it, but how could even little *muhli* like you steal out here in space?"

"They have always brought you metal from time to time, Father," Mother projected, coming out as she overthought us. "So clever of them, I always thought."

"Yes, but I've been thinking that their encountering so many meteorites was a singularly curious coincidence. And they were curious meteorites, too. I suppose the young ones made them themselves."

"But out of what, Father? You know we don't have any spare metal on the ship. That's why you haven't been able to get the repairs finished before. Where else could they get the metal but from meteorites?"

"I don't know where they get their metal from, but certainly not from meteorites. These pieces here are artifacts. Look, the metal has been more or less refined and roughly formed into shapes with crude designs upon them. Tell me the truth, Qan, where did you get these?"

"Some people gave them to us," I replied sullenly.

"People?" asked my mother. "What are people?"

"Natives of this solar system. They call themselves people."

"Nonsense!" my grandfather interjected. "It's just another one of your fantasies. You know what the astronomers say—none of the planets of this little system is capable of supporting life."

"They come from the third planet," I persisted, trying to

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keep from disgracing myself by *fllwng* in front of the other young ones. "There is life there. All of us have seen them. Besides, there is the metal."

My companions chorused agreement.

"You see, Father," my mother smiled, stroking my head with three hands, "the wise ones are not always right."

MY grandfather nodded his head slowly. "It is not impossible, I suppose. I hope it is true that these—people *gave* you and your friends the metal, Qan."

"Oh, yes, Grandfather," I thought anxiously. "Of their own free will."

"Well—" he continued, not altogether convinced — "this lot should be enough to repair the engines. Perhaps, when we take off, we should have a look at the youngsters' third planet on the way home."

"But this trip has taken such a long time already, Father," my mother protested. "Almost a *rff;* the young ones have missed nearly two semesters of school. And Qan has been getting some very peculiar ideas — from those *people,* I suppose."

"But if there is some sort of intelligent life," Grandfather thought, "it's our duty to visit it. Next time we need to stop the ship for repairs, it might be more convenient to put in at this third planet instead of just hanging out there in space. And the young ones say the natives seem to be friendly."

"I'd like to see Sam's face when he comes back and finds his 'asteroid' gone," I conceptualized.

"Yes," Ppon agreed, with the edge of his mind, but his main channel was turned in another direction. "That is the end of this game now, you know. In the next game *I* shall be leader."

"Oh, yes?" I thought back. "I'm the leader and I'm staying leader, because I am the biggest and cleverest."

"Children!" my mother protested, distressed. "I'm afraid you've picked up some really unpleasant concepts from those dreadful natives."

"Come, come, Qana," Grandfather ideated, "we mustn't be intolerant."

"Perhaps not," she replied with heat, "and I know the natives probably don't know any better, but I am not going to have my young one or anyone else's contaminated. Visit the third planet if you wish, but not this time. You'll have to make a special trip for it. I'm not going to let you stop off there while the young ones are aboard. It's obviously no fit place for children."

—EVELYN E. SMITH

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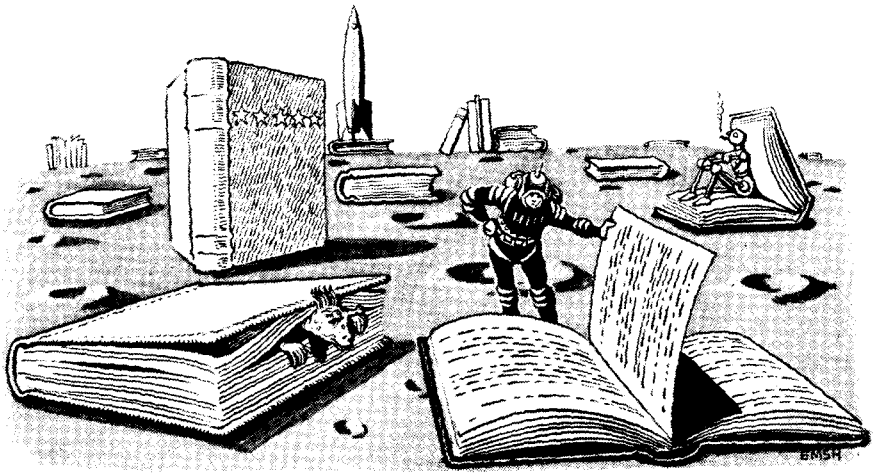

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

JUDGMENT NIGHT by C. L. Moore. Gnome Press, New York, 1952. 344 *pages,* $3.50.

HERE are five novelets by Catherine Moore, wife of Henry Kuttner and a first-rate writer in her own right. I enjoyed all the stories except one, and even that, a space opera called "Paradise Street," is superior to most of its breed.

But the other four are very good indeed. "Judgment Night," nearly novel-length, is a gaudy, somewhat overrich science-fantasy in the grand tradition. There is a galactic empress whose regime is attacked from without and within; the narrative of her struggle—and her loves—is highly satisfying.

"Promised Land" deals with some of the possible methods that will have to be developed to enable men to live far from the Sun—on Ganymede, in this instance. The plot weaves about the machinations of the boss of the satellite, a monster in body—and in mind.

"The Code" describes what might happen if one could reverse time in a human being and start him back toward babyhood. Instead of becoming a baby, he becomes a complete alien, an emigrant to another dimension.

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"Heir Apparent" tells of "integrator teams" that, by combining the powers of several specialized minds into one powerful instrument, are able to keep an overcomplex civilization going.

A rich collection, indeed—varied, imagination-stretching, written without cheapness or shallowness. I don't think you should miss this one.

THE NEXT MILLION YEARS by Charles Galton Darwin. Doubleday & Co., New York, 1952. 210 pages, $2.75

THIS regrettable little book sets before us the old argument of the eugenicists that the breed is deteriorating because the "top brains" are not reproducing themselves.

Charles Darwin's elderly grandson is also Francis Galton's godson, and Galton was one of the founders of eugenics theories. The present author has forgotten nothing his tutor taught him about the inherent superiority of the successful and the poor breeding material of the masses.

The book also touches upon the worldwide wastage of our natural resources, and the inevitable power famine that will result in a few centuries. He believes solar energy will be the solution. Atomic energy from non-radio-active sources? Sir Charles doesn't give it a thought.

Not *once* is space travel even mentioned! The physical and psychological evolution of the race in 1,000,000 years is inevitable, yet the author blandly ignores it.

As a prediction, the book is practically outdated right now. Worse still, it's dull reading, as pedestrian as a bicyclist with a flat tire—traveling backward on a jet highway to the future.

LIMBO by Bernard Wolfe. Random House, New York, 1952. 438 pages, $3.50

THIS is an exasperating, overwritten, confused, revolting and fascinating book. It shocks, disgusts, terrifies and not infrequently bores. It is as enormous—and enormously messy—as our own situation as human beings let loose amid the destroying machines of our own creation.

It contains some of the most pretentious writing in the history of the novel—and some of the most biting and important satire.

Voluntary amputation and replacement of limbs with atom-powered prosthetics creates a new elite in this future world—an elite in which women (who are not permitted the honor of amputation) become the active lovers and the preservers of the race. The theory behind the vol-amps, as they are called, is that they

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cannot carry on war, and that thus they create permanent peace. Hmmm!

The time is around 1980, after World War III. There is "Union" (the remains of Soviet Eurasia) and "Strip" (a section of the U.S.A. including Denver to the Mississippi and little more). There is the inevitable conflict between them—temporarily sublimated in athletic contests among teams of the vol-amps. There are widespread pre-frontal lobotomies to remove aggressions; flaming sexuality; super-atom-bombing; and endless juvenile attempts at mature philosophy.

Here are some of the men whose ideas and systems Wolfe has cannibalized to give the book an appearance of superior intellectual satire:

William James, whose *Moral Equivalent of War* becomes the basis of much vol-amp political jargon; Norbert Wiener, whose cypernetics theories laid the foundation for the astonishing atom-powered arms and legs of the vol-amps; Korzybsky (semantics); Burnham (the managerial society); Koestler (Yogis and Commissars); Hubbard (dianetics); Wilhelm Reich (orgone boxes); Morgenstern (and his theory of games, out of which came EMSIAC, the computer that ran World War III with no help from people); Claude Shannon; Thomas Mann; Andre Gide; Dostoyevsky (and his ghastly *Notes from the Underground*); and Marx and Darwin and Descartes and Freud—Freud, in a way, is the helpless master of the whole crazy puppet show.

The style is really incredible. There are innumerable puns, good and bad; slashing wit; dull stretches which somehow you don't dare skip because something good may be buried there; vomit; orgasms; rape (of male by female!) and so on and so on; and finally World War IV, and only the Lord knows what after that.

Once you get past the first 60 pages, which are boring but important, you find yourself caught up in this impossible-to-describe anti-Utopia and you can't quit. It's got you; and before you're done, you really have been pulled through a knothole; you're bleeding, bludgeoned, bewildered—and hypnotized.

I suppose it's actually a bad book; most of the conventional reviewers seem to think so. However, it is also a book for the bitter present, a book carrying harsh warnings of a more horrifying future.

Incidentally, it is NOT for children! Whether it is for you or not is a matter you must decide for yourself. I liked it as much as I detested it.

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CURRENTS OF SPACE by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday & Co., New York, 1952. 217 *pages,* $2.275

ASIMOV here tells of a minor episode in the history of the Trantor Empire, so brilliantly pictured in the *Foundation* series.

A "psycho-probed" "spatio-analyst" (one of those new-fangled scientists of tomorrow) has learned that the planet Florina, source of the miracle textile "kyrt," is about to be destroyed when its sun goes nova. The scientist is put out of commission to keep the fact from being known. The book tells how this attempt by the master-race of Sarkians who had enslaved the Florinians to foil the evacuation of the threatened planet was defeated, and the Florinians themselves were given their freedom.

One of Asimov's lesser efforts, but still considerably above the average space opera.

THE LEGION OF TIME by Jack Williamson. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa., 1952. 252 *pages,* $3.00

HERE are two traditional little space-time novelets from the adolescence of science fiction. Though now strictly for kids, they are naively effective despite the painful awkwardness of the writing.

The title story perfectly exemplifies a 17-year-old's wish-fancies. Denny Lanning is "thinking about time." This makes it possible for "Lethonee" (perfect name for a dream girl!) to appear before him from another space-time world and tell him that the future of both his and her world depends on him—his ability to defeat "the evil flower of the Gyronchi." To find how he does it, read the book and enjoy a return to the youth of your literacy.

"After World's End" is more of the same, only a bit bloodier; both the hero and the heroine die, believing they will meet after death. They have been to the end of Earth's time together, suffered all sorts of horrors, and finally expire in a mysterious blaze of glory that I couldn't quite figure out.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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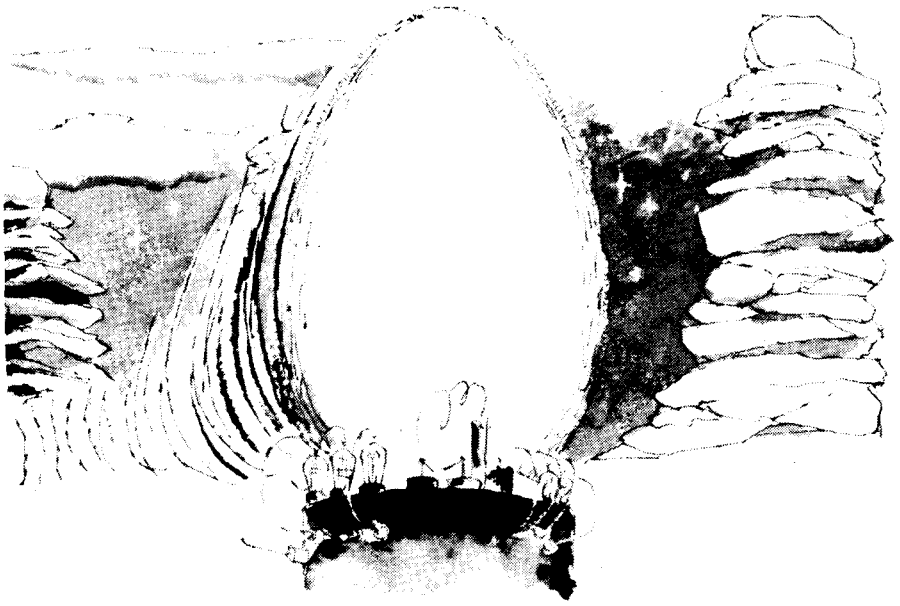

JUNKYARD

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Illustrated by SIBLEY

One thing this planet could not be accused of was lack of hospitality. Anytime it had company, it wanted them to stay — for good!

I

THEY had solved the mystery—with a guess, a very erudite and educated guess—but they didn't know a thing, not a single thing, for certain. That wasn't the way a planetary survey team usually did a job. Usually they nailed it down and

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wrung a lot of information out of it and could parade an impressive roll of facts. But here there was no actual, concrete fact beyond the one that would have been obvious to a twelve-year-old child.

Commander Ira Warren was worried about it. He said as much to Bat Ears Brady, ship's cook and slightly disreputable pal of his younger days. The two of them had been planet-checking together for more than thirty years. While they stood at opposite poles on the table of organization, they were able to say to one another things they could not have said to any other man aboard the survey ship or have allowed another man to say to them.

"Bat Ears," said Warren, "I'm just a little worried."

"You're always worried," Bat Ears retorted. "That's part of the job you have."

"This junkyard business . . ."

"You wanted to get ahead," said Bat Ears, "and I told you what would happen. I warned you you'd get yourself weighed down with worry and authority and pomp—pomp—"

"Pomposity?"

"That's the word," said Bat Ears. "That's the word, exactly."

"I'm not pompous, Warren contradicted.

"No, you're worried about this junkyard business. I got a bottle stowed away. How about a little drink?"

WARREN waved away the thought. "Someday I'll bust you wide open. Where you hide the stuff, I don't know, but every trip we make . . ."

"Now, Ira! Don't go losing your lousy temper."

"Every trip we make, you carry enough dead weight of liquor to keep you annoyingly aglow for the entire cruise."

"It's baggage," Bat Ears insisted. "A man is allowed some baggage weight. I don't have hardly nothing else. I just bring along my drinking."

"Someday," said Warren savagely, "it's going to get you booted off the ship about five light-years from nowhere."

The threat was an old one. It failed to dismay Bat Ears.

"This worrying you're doing," Bat Ears said, "ain't doing you no good."

"But the survey team didn't do the job," objected Warren. "Don't you see what this means? For the first time in more than a hundred years of survey, we've found what appears to be evidence that some other race than Man has achieved space flight. And we don't know a thing about it. We should know. With all that junk out there, we'd ought to be able by

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this time to write a book about it."

Bat Ears spat in contempt. "You mean them scientists of ours."

The way he said "scientist" made it a dirty word.

"They're good," said Warren. "The very best there is."

"Remember the old days, Ira?" asked Bat Ears. "When you was second looey and you used to come down and we'd have a drink together and . . ."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"We had real men in them days. We'd get ourselves a club and go hunt us up some natives and beat a little sense into them and we'd get more facts in half a day than these scientists, with all their piddling around, will get in a month of Sundays."

"This is slightly different," Warren said. "There are no natives here."

There wasn't, as a matter of fact, much of anything on this particular planet. It was strictly a low-grade affair and it wouldn't amount to much for another billion years. The survey, understandably, wasn't too interested in planets that wouldn't amount to much for another billion years.

Its surface was mostly rock outcroppings and tumbled boulder fields. In the last half million years or so, primal plants had gotten started and were doing well. Mosses and lichens crept into the crevices and crawled across the rocks, but aside from that there seemed to be no life. Although, strictly speaking, you couldn't be positive, for no one had been interested in the planet. They hadn't looked it over and they hadn't searched for life; everyone had been too interested in the junkyard.

They had never intended to land, but had circled the planet, making routine checks and entering routine data in the survey record.

Then someone at a telescope had seen the junkyard and they'd gone down to investigate and had been forthrightly pitchforked into a maddening puzzle.

THEY had called it the junkyard and that was what it was. Strewn about were what probably were engine parts, although no one was quite sure. Pollard, the mech engineer, had driven himself to the verge of frenzy trying to figure out how to put some of the parts together. He finally got three of them assembled, somehow, and they didn't mean a thing, so he tried to take them apart again to figure out how he'd done it. He couldn't get them apart. It was about that time that Pollard practically blew his top.

The engine parts, if that was

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what they were, were scattered all over the place, as if someone or something had tossed them away, not caring where they fell. But off to one side was a pile of other stuff, all neatly stacked, and it was apparent even to the casual glance that this stuff must be a pile of supplies.

There was what more than likely was food, though it was a rather strange kind of food (if that was what it was), and strangely fabricated bottles of plastic that held a poison liquid, and other stuff that was fabric and might have been clothing, although it gave one the shudders trying to figure out what sort of creatures would have worn that kind of clothing and bundles of metallic bars, held together in the bundles by some kind of gravitational attraction instead of the wires that a human would have used to tie them in bundles. And a number of other objects for which there were no names.

"They should have found the answer," Warren said. "They've cracked tougher nuts than this. In the month we've been here, they should have had that engine running."

"If it is an engine," Bat Ears pointed out.

"What else could it be?"

"You're getting so that you sound like them. Run into something that you can't explain and think up the best guess possible and when someone questions you, you ask what else it could be. And that ain't proof, Ira."

"You're right, Bat Ears," Warren admitted. "It certainly isn't proof and that's what worries me. We have no doubt the junk out there is a spaceship engine, but we have no proof of it."

"Nobody's going to land a ship," said Bat Ears testily, "and rip out the engine and just throw it away. If they'd done that, the ship would still be here."

"But if that's not the answer," demanded Warren, "what is all that stuff out there?"

"I wouldn't know. I'm not even curious. I ain't the one that's worrying."

He got up from the chair and moved toward the door.

"I still got that bottle, Ira."

"No, thanks," Warren said.

He sat and listened to Bat Ear's feet going down the stairs.

II

KENNETH SPENCER, the alien psychologist, came into the cabin and sat down in the chair across the desk from Warren.

"We're finally through," he said.

"You aren't through," challenged Warren. "You haven't even started."

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"We've done all we can."

Warren grunted at him.

"We've run all sorts of tests," said Spencer. "We've got a book full of analyses. We have a complete photographic record and everything is down on paper in diagrams and notes and—"

"Then tell me: What is that junk out there?"

"It's a spaceship engine."

"If it's an engine," Warren said, "let's put it together. Let's find out how it runs. Let's figure out the kind of intelligence most likely to have built it."

"We tried," replied Spencer. "All of us tried. Some of us didn't have applicable knowledge or training, but even so we worked; we helped the ones who had training."

"I know how hard you worked."

And they had worked hard, only snatching stolen hours to sleep, eating on the run.

"We are dealing with alien mechanics," Spencer said.

"We've dealt with other alien concepts," Warren reminded him. "Alien economics and alien religions and alien psychology . . ."

"But this is different."

"Not so different. Take Pollard, now. He is the key man in this situation. Wouldn't you have said that Pollard should have cracked it?"

"If it can be cracked, Pollard is your man. He has everything—the theory, the experience, the imagination."

"You think we should leave?" asked Warren. "That's what you came in to tell me? You think there is no further use of staying here?"

"That's about it," Spencer admitted.

"All right," Warren told him. "If you say so, I'll take your word for it. We'll blast off right after supper. I'll tell Bat Ears to fix us up a spread. A sort of achievement dinner."

"Don't rub it in so hard," protested Spencer. "We're not proud of what we've done."

Warren heaved himself out of the chair.

"I'll go down and tell Mac to get the engines ready. On the way down, I'll drop in on Bat Ears and tell him."

Spencer said, "I'm worried, Warren."

"So am I. What is worrying you?"

"Who are these things, these other people, who had the other spaceship? They're the first, you know, the first evidence we've ever run across of another race that had discovered space flight. And what happened to them here?"

"Scared?"

"Yes. Aren't you?"

"Not yet," said Warren. "I

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probably will be when I have the time to think it over."

He went down the stairs to talk to Mac about the engines.

III

HE found Mac sitting in his cubby hole, smoking his blackened pipe and reading his thumb-marked Bible.

"Good news," Warren said to him.

Mac laid down the book and took off his glasses.

"There's but one thing you could tell me that would be good news," he said.

"This is it. Get the engines ready. We'll be blasting off."

"When, sir? Not that it can be too soon."

"In a couple of hours or so," said Warren. "We'll eat and get settled in. I'll give you the word."

The engineer folded the spectacles and slid them in his pocket. He tapped the pipe out in his hand and tossed away the ashes and put the dead pipe back between his teeth.

"I've never liked this place," he said.

"You never like any place."

"I don't like them towers."

"You're crazy, Mac. There aren't any towers."

"The boys and me went walking," said the engineer. "We found a bunch of towers."

"Rock formations, probably."

"Towers," insisted the engineer doggedly.

"If you found some towers," Warren demanded, "why didn't you report them?"

"And have them science beagles go baying after them and have to stay another month?"

"It doesn't matter," Warren said. "They probably aren't towers. Who would mess around building towers on this backwash of a planet?"

"They were scary," Mac told him. "They had that black look about them. And the smell of death."

"It's the Celt in you. The big, superstitious Celt you are, rocketing through space from world to world—and still believing in banshees and spooks. The medieval mind in the age of science."

Mac said, "They fair give a man the shivers."

They stood facing one another for a long moment. Then Warren put out a hand and tapped the other gently on the shoulder.

"I won't say a word about them," he said. "Now get those engines rolling."

IV

WARREN sat in silence at the table's head, listening to the others talk.

"It was a jury-rigged job," said

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Clyne, the physicist. "They tore out a lot of stuff and rebuilt the engine for some reason or other and there was a lot of the stuff they tore out that they didn't use again. For some reason, they had to rebuild the engine and they rebuilt it simpler than it was before. Went back to basic principles and cut out the fancy stuff—automatics and other gadgets like that — but the one they rebuilt must have been larger and more unwieldy, less compact, than the one that they ripped down. That would explain why they left some of their supplies behind."

"But," asked Dyer, the chemist, "what did they jury-rig it with? Where did they get the material?"

Briggs, the metallurgist, said, "This place crawls with ore. If it wasn't so far out, it would be a gold mine."

"We saw no signs of mining," Dyer objected. "No signs of mining or smelting and refining or of fabrication."

"We didn't go exploring," Clyne pointed out. "They might have done some mining a few miles away from here and we'd have never known it."

Spencer said, "That's the trouble with us on this whole project. We've adopted suppositions and let them stand as fact. If they had to do some fabrication, it might be important to know a little more about it."

"What difference does it make?" asked Clyne. "We know the basic facts—a spaceship landed here in trouble, they finally repaired their engines, and they took off once again."

Old Doc Spears, down at the table's end, slammed his fork on his plate.

"You don't even know," he said, "that it was a spaceship. I've listened to you caterwauling about this thing for weeks. I've never seen so damn much motion and so few results in all my born days."

All of them looked a little surprised. Old Doc was normally a mild man and he usually paid little attention to what was going on, bumbling around on his regular rounds to treat a smashed thumb or sore throat or some other minor ailment. All of them had wondered, with a slight sickish feeling, how Old Doc might perform if he faced a real emergency, like major surgery, say. They didn't have much faith in him, but they liked him well enough. Probably they liked him mostly because he didn't mix into their affairs.

And here he was, mixing right into them truculently.

Lang, the communications man, said, "We found the scratches, Doc. You remember that. Scratches on the rock. The

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kind of scratches that a spaceship could have made in landing."

"*Could* have made," said Doc derisively.

"*Must* have made!"

OLD Doc snorted and went on with his eating, holding his head down over the plate, napkin tucked beneath his chin, shoveling in the food with fork and knife impartially. Doc was noted as a messy eater.

"I have a feeling," Spencer said, "that we may be off the beaten track in thinking of this as a simple repair job. From the amount of parts that are down there in the junkyard, I'd say that they found it necessary to do a redesigning job, to start from the beginning and build an entirely new engine to get them out of here. I have a feeling that those engine parts out there represent the whole engine, that if we knew how, we could put those parts together and we'd have an engine."

"I tried it," Pollard answered.

"I can't quite buy the idea that it was a complete redesigning job," Clyne stated. "That would mean a new approach and some new ideas that would rule out the earlier design and all the parts that had been built into the original engine as it stood. The theory would explain why there are so many parts strewn around, but it's just not possible. You don't redesign an engine when you're stranded on a barren planet. You stick to what you know."

Dyer said, "Accepting an idea like redesigning sends you back again to the problem of materials."

"And tools," added Lang. "Where would they get the tools?"

"They'd probably have a machine shop right on board the ship," said Spencer.

"For minor repairs," Lang corrected. "Not the kind of equipment you would need to build a complete new engine."

"What worries me," said Pollard, "is our absolute inability to understand any of it. I tried to fit those parts together, tried to figure out the relationship of the various parts — and there must be some sort of relationship, because unrelated parts would make no sense at all. Finally I was able to fit three of them together and that's as far as I could get. When I got them together, they didn't spell a thing. They simply weren't going anywhere. Even with three of them together, you were no better off, no further along in understanding, than before you'd put them together. And when I tried to get them apart,

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I couldn't do that, either. You'd think, once a man had got a thing together, he could take it apart again, wouldn't you?"

"It was an alien ship," Spencer offered, "built by alien people, run by alien engines."

"Even so," said Pollard, "there should have been some basic idea that we could recognize. In some way or other, their engine should have operated along at least one principle that would be basic with human mechanics. An engine is a piece of mechanism that takes raw power and controls it and directs it into useful energy. That would be its purpose, no matter what race built it."

"The metal," said Briggs, "is an alien alloy, totally unlike anything we have ever run across. You can identify the components, all right, but the formula, when you get it down, reads like a metallic nightmare. It shouldn't work. By Earth standards, it *wouldn't* work. There's some secret in the combination that I can't even guess at."

Old Doc said, from the table's end, "You're to be congratulated, Mr. Briggs, upon your fine sense of restraint."

"Cut it out, Doc," Warren ordered sharply, speaking for the first time.

"All right," said Doc. "If that's the way you want it, Ira, I will cut it out."

V

STANDING outside the ship, Warren looked across the planet. Evening was fading into night and the junkyard was no more than a grotesque blotch of deeper shadow on the hillside.

Once, not long ago, another ship had rested here, just a little way from where they rested now. Another ship—another race.

And something had happened to that ship, something that his survey party had tried to ferret out and had failed to discover.

It had not been a simple repair job; he was sure of that. No matter what any of them might say, it had been considerably more than routine repair.

There had been some sort of emergency, a situation with a strange urgency about it. They had left in such a hurry that they had abandoned some of their supplies. No commander of any spaceship, be he human or alien, would leave supplies behind except when life or death was involved in his escape.

There was what appeared to be food in the stack of supplies—at least, Dyer had said that it was food, although it didn't look edible. And there were the plastic-like bottles filled with a poison that might be, as like as not, the equivalent of an alien whisky. And no man, Warren said, leaves

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food and whisky behind except in the direst emergency.

He walked slowly down the trail they'd beaten between the ship's lock and the junkyard and it struck him that he walked in a silence that was as deep as the awful stillness of far space. There was nothing here to make any sound at all. There was no life except the mosses and the lichens and the other primal plants that crept among the rocks. In time there would be other life, for the planet had the air and water and the basic ingredients for soil and here, in another billion years or so, there might arise a life economy as complex as that of Earth.

But a billion years, he thought, is a long, long time.

He reached the junkyard and walked its familiar ground, dodging the larger pieces of machinery that lay all about, stumbling on one or two of the smaller pieces that lay unseen in the darkness.

THE second time he stumbled, he stooped and picked up the thing he had stumbled on and it was, he knew, one of the tools that the alien race had left behind them when they fled. He could picture them, dropping their tools and fleeing, but the picture was not clear. He could not decide what these aliens might have looked like or what they might have fled from.

He tossed the tool up and down, catching it in his hand. It was light and handy and undoubtedly there was some use for it, but he did not know the use nor did any of the others up there in the ship. Hand or tentacle, claw or paw — what appendage had it been that had grasped the tool? What mind lay behind the hand or tentacle, claw or paw that had grasped and used it?

He stood and threw back his head and looked at the stars that shone above the planet and they were not the familiar stars he had known when he was a child.

Far out, he thought, far out. The farthest out that Man had ever been.

A sound jerked him around, the sound of running feet coming down the trail.

"Warren!" cried a voice. "Warren! Where are you?"

There was fright in that voice, the frantic note of panic that one hears in the screaming of a terrified child.

"Warren!"

"Here!" shouted Warren. "Over here. I'm coming."

He swung around and hurried to meet the man who was running in the dark.

The runner would have charged on past him if he had not put out a hand and gripped him by the shoulder and pulled him to a halt.

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"Warren! Is that you?"

"What's the matter, Mac?" asked Warren.

"I can't . . . I can't . . . I . . ."

"What's wrong? Speak up! You can't what, Mac?"

He felt the engineer's fumbling hands reaching out for him, grasping at his coat lapels, hanging onto him as if the engineer were a drowning man.

"Come on, come on," Warren urged with the impatience of alarm.

"I can't start the engines, sir," said Mac.

"Can't start the . . ."

"I can't start them, sir. And neither can the others. None of us can start them, sir."

"The engines!" said Warren, terror rising swiftly. "What's the matter with the engines?"

"There's nothing the matter with the engines. It's us, sir. We can't start them."

"Talk sense, man. Why can't you?"

"We can't remember how. We've forgotten how to start the engines!"

VI

WARREN switched on the light above the desk and straightened, seeking out the book among the others on the shelf.

"It's right here, Mac," he said. "I knew I had it here."

He found it and took it down and opened it beneath the light. He leafed the pages rapidly. Behind him he could hear the tense, almost terrified breathing of the engineer.

"It's all right, Mac. It's all here in the book."

He leafed too far ahead and had to back up a page or two and reached the place and spread the book wide beneath the lamp.

"Now," he said, "we'll get those engines started. It tells right here . . ."

He tried to read and couldn't.

He could understand the words all right and the symbols, but the sum of the words he read made little sense and the symbols none at all.

He felt the sweat breaking out on him, running down his forehead and gathering in his eyebrows, breaking out of his armpits and trickling down his ribs.

"What's the matter, Chief?" asked Mac. "What's the matter now?"

Warren felt his body wanting to shake, straining every nerve to tremble, but it wouldn't move. He was frozen stiff.

"This is the engine manual," he said, his voice cold and low. "It tells all about the engines—how they operate, how to locate trouble, how to fix them."

"Then we're all right," breathed Mac, enormously relieved.

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Warren closed the book.

"No, we aren't, Mac. I've forgotten all the symbols and most of the terminology."

"You what!"

"I can't read the book," said Warren.

VII

"IT just isn't possible," argued Spencer.

"It's not only possible," Warren told him. "It happened. Is there any one of you who can read that book?"

They didn't answer him.

"If there's anyone who can," invited Warren, "step up and show us how."

Clyne said quietly, "There's none of us can read it."

"And yet," declared Warren, "an hour ago any one of you—any single one of you—probably would have bet his life that he not only could start the engines if he had to, but could take the manual if he couldn't and figure how to do it."

"You're right," Clyne agreed. "We would have bet our lives. An hour ago we would have. It would have been a safe, sure bet."

"That's what you think," said Warren. "How do you know how long it's been since you couldn't read the manual?"

"We don't, of course," Clyne was forced to admit.

"There's something more. You didn't find the answer to the junkyard. You *guessed* an answer, but you didn't *find* one. And you should have. You know damn well you should have."

Clyne rose to his feet. "Now see here, Warren . . ."

"Sit down, John," said Spencer. "Warren's got us dead to rights. We didn't find an answer and we know we didn't. We took a guess and substituted it for the answer that we didn't find. And Warren's right about something else—we should have found the answer."

Under any other circumstances, Warren thought, they might have hated him for those blunt truths, but now they didn't. They just sat there and he could see the realization seeping into them.

Dyer finally said, "You think we failed out there because we forgot—just like Mac forgot."

"You lost some of your skills," replied Warren, "some of your skills and knowledge. You worked as hard as ever. You went through the motions. You didn't have the skill or knowledge any more, that's all."

"And now?" asked Lang.

"I don't know."

"This is what happened to that other ship," said Briggs emphatically.

"Maybe," Warren said with less conviction.

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"But they got away," Clyne pointed out.

"So will we," promised Warren. "Somehow."

VIII

THE crew of that other, alien ship had evidently forgotten, too. But somehow or other they had blasted off — somehow or other they had remembered, or forced themselves to remember. But if it had been the simple matter of remembering, why had they rebuilt the engines? They could have used their own.

Warren lay in his bunk, staring into the blackness, knowing that a scant two feet above his head there was a plate of steel, but he couldn't see the steel. And he knew there was a way to start the engines, a simple way once you knew it or remembered it, but he couldn't see that, either.

Man experienced incidents, gathered knowledge, knew emotion—and then, in the course of time, forgot the incident and knowledge and emotion. Life was a long series of forgettings. Memories were wiped out and old knowledge dulled and skill was lost, but it took time to wipe it out or dull it or lose it. You couldn't know a thing one day and forget it on the next.

But here on this barren world, in some impossible way, the forgetting had been speeded up. On Earth it took years to forget an incident or to lose a skill. Here it happened overnight.

He tried to sleep and couldn't. He finally got up and dressed and went down the stairs, out the lock into the alien night.

A low voice asked, "That you, Ira?"

"It's me, Bat Ears. I couldn't sleep. I'm worried."

"You're always worried," Bat Ears. "It's an occu . . . occu . . ."

"Occupational?"

"That's it," said Bat Ears, hiccoughing just a little. "That's the word I wanted. Worry is an occupational disease with you."

"We're in a jam, Bat Ears."

"There's been planets," Bat Ears said, "I wouldn't of minded so much being marooned on, but this ain't one of them. This here place is the tail end of creation."

They stood together in the darkness with the sweep of alien stars above them and the silent planet stretching off to a vague horizon.

"There's something here," Bat Ears went on. "You can smell it in the air. Them fancy-pants in there said there wasn't nothing here because they couldn't see nothing and the books they'd read said nothing much could live on a planet that was just rocks and moss. But, me, I've seen planets. Me, I was planet-

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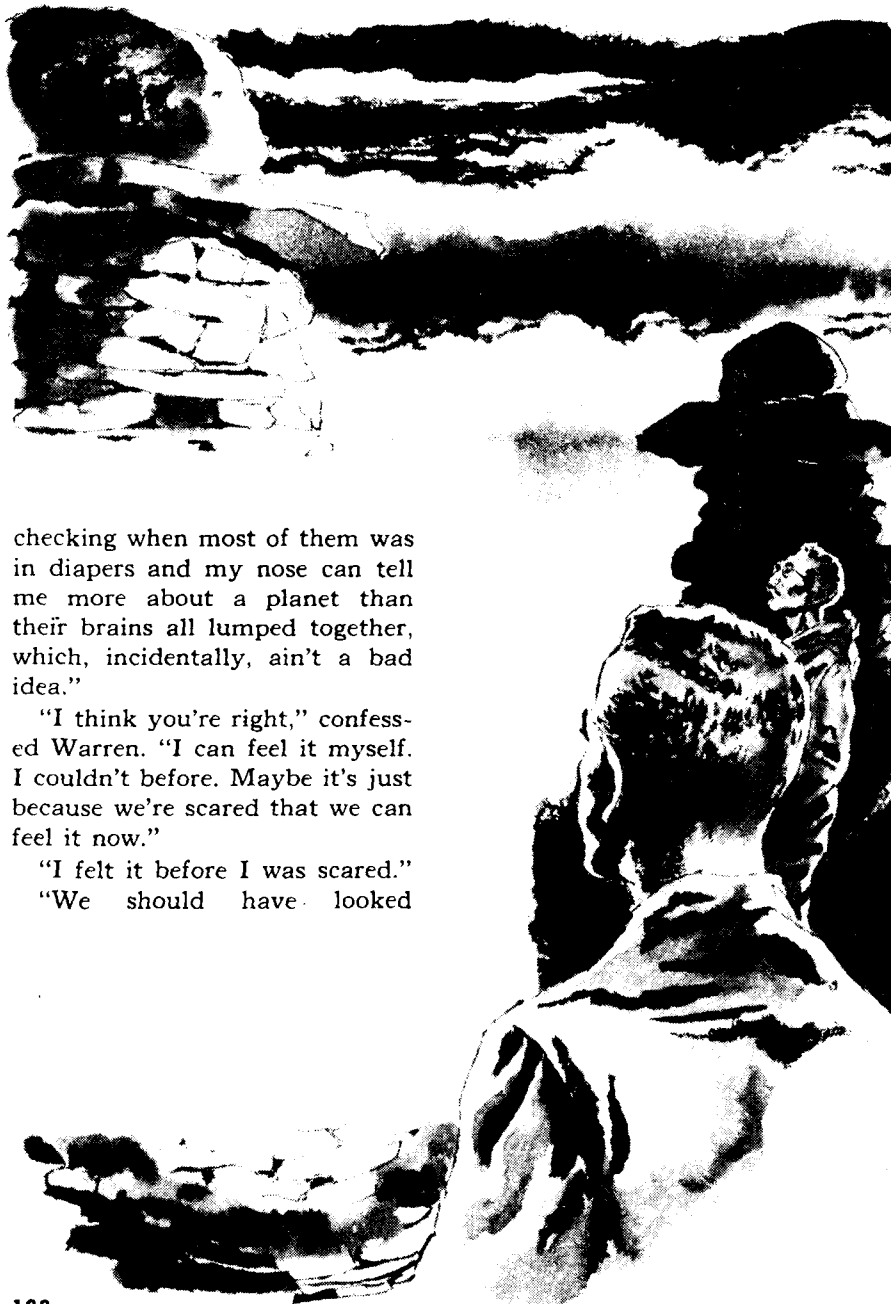

checking when most of them was in diapers and my nose can tell me more about a planet than their brains all lumped together, which, incidentally, ain't a bad idea."

"I think you're right," confessed Warren. "I can feel it myself. I couldn't before. Maybe it's just because we're scared that we can feel it now."

"I felt it before I was scared."

"We should have looked

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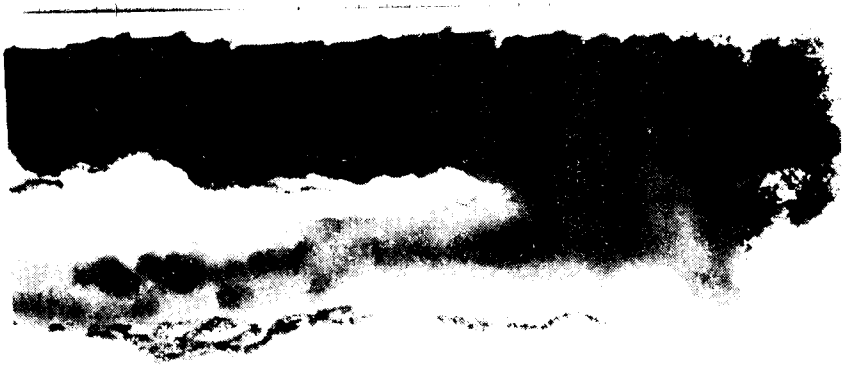

around. That's where we made our mistake. But there was so much work to do in the junkyard that we never thought of it."

"Mac took a little jaunt," said Bat Ears. "Says he found some towers."

"He told me about them, too."

"Mac was just a little green around the gills when he was telling me."

"He told me he didn't like them."

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"If there was any place to run to, Mac would be running right now."

"In the morning," Warren said, "we'll go and see those towers."

IX

THEY were towers, all right, and there were eight of them in line, like watch towers that at one time had stretched across the planet, but something had happened and all the others had been leveled except the eight that were standing there.

They were built of undressed native rock, crudely piled, without mortar and with little wedges and slabs of stone used in the interstices to make the stones set solid. They were the kind of towers that might have been built by a savage race and they had an ancient look about them. They were about six feet at the base and tapered slightly toward the top and each of them was capped by a huge flat stone with an enormous boulder placed upon the slab to hold it in its place.

Warren said to Ellis, "This is your department. Take over."

The little archeologist didn't answer. He walked around the nearest tower and went up close to it and examined it. He put out his hands and acted as if he meant to shake the tower, but it didn't shake.

"Solid," he said. "Well built and old."

"Type F culture, I would say," guessed Spencer.

"Maybe less than that. No attempt at an esthetic effect—pure utility. But good craftsmanship."

Clyne said, "Its purpose is the thing. What were the towers built for?"

"Storage space," said Spencer.

"A marker," Lang contradicted. "A claim marker, a cache marker . . ."

"We can find the purpose," Warren said. "That is something we needn't argue nor speculate about. All we have to do is knock off the boulder and lift the cap and have a look inside."

He strode up to the tower and started climbing it.

It was an easy thing to climb, for there were niches in the stones and hand and toe holds were not too hard to find.

He reached the top.

"Look out below," he yelled, and heaved at the boulder.

It rolled and then slowly settled back. He braced himself and heaved again and this time it toppled. It went plunging off the tower, smashed to the ground, went rumbling down the slope, gathering speed, hitting other boulders in its path, zigzagging with the deflection of its course, thrown high into the air by the boulders that it hit.

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WARREN said, "Throw a rope up to me. I'll fasten it to the capstone and then we can haul it off."

"We haven't got a rope," said Clyne.

"Someone run back to the ship and get one. I'll wait here till he returns."

Briggs started back toward the ship.

Warren straightened up. From the tower he had a fine view of the country and he swiveled slowly, examining it.

Somewhere nearby, he thought, the men—well, not men, but the things that built these towers—must have had their dwelling. Within a mile or so there had been at one time a habitation. For the towers would have taken time in building and that meant that the ones who built them must have had at least a semi-permanent location.

But there was nothing to see—nothing but tumbled boulder fields and great outcroppings and the blankets of primal plants that ran across their surfaces.

What did they live on? Why were they here? What would have attracted them? What would have held them here?

He halted in his pivoting, scarcely believing what he saw. Carefully he traced the form of it, making sure that the light on some boulder field was not befuddling his vision.

It couldn't be, he told himself. It couldn't happen three times. He must be wrong.

He sucked in his breath and held it and waited for the illusion to go away.

It didn't go away. The thing was there.

"Spencer," he called. "Spencer, please come up here."

He continued watching it. Below him, he heard Spencer scrabbling up the tower. He reached down a hand and helped him.

"Look," Warren said, pointing. "What is that out there?"

"A ship!" cried Spencer. "There's another ship out there!"

THE spaceship was old, incredibly old. It was red with rust; you could put your hand against its metal hide and sweep your hand across it and the flakes of rust would rain down upon the rock and your hand would come away painted with rust.

The airlock once had been closed, but someone or something had battered a hole straight through it without opening it, for the rim was still in place against the hull and the jagged hole ran to the ship's interior. For yards around the lock, the ground was red with violently scattered rust.

They clambered through the hole. Inside, the ship was bright

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and shining, without a trace of rust, although there was a coating of dust over everything. Through the dust upon the floor was a beaten track and many isolated footprints where the owners of the prints had stepped out of the path. They were alien tracks, with a heavy heel and three great toes, for all the world like the tracks of a mighty bird or some long-dead dinosaur.

The trail led through the ship back to the engine room and there the empty platform stood, with the engines gone.

"That's how they got away," said Warren, "the ones who junked their engines. They took the engines off this ship and put them in their ship and then they took off."

"But they wouldn't know—" argued Clyne.

"They evidently did," Warren interrupted bluntly.

Spencer said, "They must have been the ones. This ship has been here for a long time—the rust will tell you that. And it was closed, hermetically sealed, because there's no rust inside. That hole was punched through the lock fairly recently and the engines taken."

"That means, then," said Lang, "that they did junk their engines. They ripped them out entire and heaved them in the junkpile. They tore them out and replaced them with the engines from this ship."

"But why?" asked Clyne. "Why did they have to do it?"

"Because," said Spencer, "they didn't know how to operate their own engines."

"But if they didn't know how to operate their engines, how could they run this one?"

"HE'S got you there," said Dyer. "That's one that you can't answer."

"No, I can't," shrugged Warren. "But I wish I could, because then we'd have the answer ourselves."

"How long ago," asked Spencer, "would you say this ship landed here? How long would it take for a spaceship hull to rust?"

"It's hard to tell," Slyne answered. "It would depend on the kind of metal they used. But you can bet on this—any spaceship hull, no matter who might have built it, would be the toughest metal the race could fabricate."

"A thousand years?" Warren suggested.

"I don't know," said Clyne. "Maybe a thousand years. Maybe more than that. You see this dust. That's what's left of whatever organic material there was in the ship. If the beings that landed here remained within the ship, they still are here in the form of dust."

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Warren tried to think, tried to sort out the chronology of the whole thing.

A thousand years ago, or thousands of years ago, a spaceship had landed here and had not got away.

Then another spaceship landed, a thousand or thousands of years later, and it, too, was unable to get away. But it finally escaped when the crew robbed the first ship of its engines and substituted them for the ones that had brought it here.

Then years, or months, or days later, the Earth survey ship had landed here and it, too, couldn't get away—because the men who ran it couldn't remember how to operate its engines.

He swung around and strode from the engine room, leaving the others there, following the path in the dust back to the shattered lock.

And just inside the port, sitting on the floor, making squiggles in the dust with an awkward finger, sat Briggs, who had gone back to the ship to get a length of rope.

"Briggs," said Warren sharply. "Briggs, what are you doing here?"

Briggs looked up with vacant, laughing eyes.

"Go away," he said.

Then he went back to making squiggles in the dust.

XI

DOC SPEARS said, "Briggs reverted to childhood. His mind is wiped as clean as a one-year-old's. He can talk, which is about the only difference between a child and him. But his vocabulary is limited and what he says makes very little sense."

"He can be taught again?" asked Warren.

"I don't know."

"Spencer had a look at him. What does Spencer say?"

"Spencer said a lot," Doc told him. "It adds up, substantially, to practically total loss of memory."

"What can we do?"

"Watch him. See he doesn't get hurt. After a while we might try re-education. He may even pick up some things by himself. Something happened to him. Whether whatever it was that took his memory away also injured his brain is something I can't say for sure. It doesn't appear injured, but without a lot of diagnostic equipment we don't have, you can't be positive."

"There's no sign of injury?"

"There's not a single mark anywhere," said Doc. "He isn't hurt. That is, not physically. It's only his mind that's been injured. Maybe not his mind, either—just his memory gone."

"Amnesia?"

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"Not amnesia. When you have that, you're confused. You are haunted by the thought that you have forgotten something. You're all tangled up. Briggs isn't confused or tangled. He seems to be happy enough."

"You'll take care of him, Doc? Kind of keep an eye on him?"

Doc snorted and got up and left.

Warren called after him, "If you see Bat Ears down there, tell him to come up."

Doc clumped down the stairs.

Warren sat and stared at the blank wall opposite him.

First Mac and his crew had forgotten how to run the engines. That was the first sign of what was happening—the first recognizable sign—for it had been going on long before Mac found he'd forgotten all his engine lore.

The crew of investigators had lost some of their skills and their knowledge almost from the first. How else could one account for the terrible mess they'd made of the junkyard business? Under ordinary circumstances, they would have wrung some substantial information from the engine parts and the neatly stacked supplies. They had gotten information of a sort, of course, but it added up to nothing. Under ordinary circumstances, it should have added up to an extraordinary something.

He heard feet coming up the stairs, but the tread was too crisp for Bat Ears.

It was Spencer.

SPENCER flopped into one of the chairs. He sat there opening and closing his hands, looking down at them with helpless anger.

"Well?" asked Warren. "Anything to report?"

"Briggs got into that first tower," said Spencer. "Apparently he came back with the rope and found us gone, so he climbed up and threw a hitch around the capstone, then climbed down again and pulled it off. The capstone is lying on the ground, at the foot of the tower, with the rope still hitched around it."

Warren nodded. "He could have done that. The capstone wasn't too heavy. One man could have pulled it off."

"There's something in that tower."

"You took a look?"

"After what happened to Briggs? Of course not. I posted a guard to keep everyone away. We can't go monkeying around with the tower until we've thought a few things through."

"What do you think is in there?"

"I don't know," said Spencer. "All I have is an idea. We know what it can do. It can strip your memory."

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"Maybe it's fright that did it," Warren said. "Something down in the tower so horrible . . ."

Spencer shook his head. "There is no evidence of fright in Briggs. He's calm. Sits there happy as a clam, playing with his fingers and talking silly sentences—happy sentences. The way a kid would talk."

"Maybe what he's saying will give us a hint. Keep someone listening all the time. Even if the words don't mean much . . ."

"It wouldn't do any good. Not only is his memory gone, but even the memory of what took it away."

"What do you plan to do?"

"Try to get into the tower," said Spencer. "Try to find out what's in there. There must be a way of getting at whatever is there and coming out okay."

"Look," Warren stated, "we have enough as it is."

"I have a hunch."

"This is the first time I've ever heard you use that word. You gents don't operate on hunches. You operate on fact."

Spencer put up an outspread hand and wiped it across his face.

"I don't know what's the matter with me, Warren. I know I've never thought in hunches before. Perhaps because now I can't help myself, the hunch comes in and fills the place of knowledge that I've lost."

"You admit there's been knowledge lost?"

"Of course I do," said Spencer. "You were right about the junkyard. We should have done a better job."

"And now you have a hunch."

"IT'S crazy," said Spencer. "At least, it sounds crazy. That memory, that lost knowledge and lost skill went somewhere. Maybe there's something in the tower that took it away. I have the silly feeling we might get it back again, take it back from the thing that has it."

He looked challengingly at Warren. "You think I'm cracked."

Warren shook his head. "No, not that. Just grasping at straws."

Spencer got up heavily. "I'll do what I can. I'll talk with the others. We'll try to think it out before we try anything."

When he had gone, Warren buzzed the engine room communicator.

Mac's voice came reedily out of the box.

"Having any luck, Mac?"

"None at all," Mac told him. "We sit and look at the engines. We are going out of our heads trying to remember."

"I guess that's all you can do, Mac."

"We could mess around with them, but I'm afraid if we do, we'll get something out of kilter."

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"Keep your hands off everything," commanded Warren in sudden alarm. "Don't touch a single thing. God knows what you might do."

"We're just sitting," Mac said, "and looking at the engines and trying to remember."

Crazy, thought Warren.

Of course it was crazy.

Down there were men trained to operate spaceship engines, men who had lived and slept with engines for year on lonesome year. And now they sat and looked at engines and wondered how to run them.

Warren got up from his desk and went slowly down the stairs.

In the cook's quarters, he found Bat Ears.

Bat Ears had fallen off a chair and was fast asleep upon the floor, breathing heavily. The room reeked with liquor fumes. An almost empty bottle sat upon the table.

Warren reached out a foot and prodded Bat Ears gently. Bat Ears moaned a little in his sleep.

Warren picked up the bottle and held it to the light. There was one good, long drink.

He tilted the bottle and took the drink, then hurled the empty bottle against the wall. The broken plastiglass sprayed in a shower down on Bat Ears' head.

Bat Ears raised a hand and brushed it off, as if brushing away a fly. Then he slept on, smiling, with his mind comfortably drugged against memories he no longer had.

XII

THEY covered the tower with the capstone once again and rigged a tripod and pulley above it. Then they took the capstone off and used the pulley to lower an automatic camera into the pit and they got their pictures.

There was something in the tower, all right.

They spread the pictures out on the table in the mess room and tried to make out what they had.

It was shaped like a watermelon or an egg stood on one end with the lower end slightly mashed so that it would stand upright. It sprouted tiny hairs all over and some of the hairs were blurred in the pictures, as if they might have been vibrating. There was tubing and what seemed to be wiring, even if it didn't look exactly the way you thought of wiring, massed around the lower end of the egg.

They made other tests, lowering the instruments with the pulley, and they determined that the egg was alive and that it was the equivalent of a warm-blooded animal, although they were fairly sure that its fluids would not

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be identical with blood.

It was soft and unprotected by any covering shell and it pulsed and gave out some sort of vibrations. They couldn't determine what sort of vibrations. The little hairs that covered it were continually in motion.

They put the capstone back in place again, but left the tripod and the pulley standing.

Howard, the biologist, said, "It's alive and it's an organism of some kind, but I'm not at all convinced that it's pure animal. Those wires and that piping lead straight into it, as if, you'd almost swear, the piping and the wires were a part of it. And look at these — what would you call them? — these studs, almost like connections for other wires."

"It's not inconceivable," said Spencer, "that an animal and a mechanism should be joined together. Take Man and his machines. Man and the machines work together, but Man maintains his individual identit and the machines maintain thei own. In a lot of cases it would make more sense, economically, if not socially, that Man and machine should be one, that the two of them be joined together, become, in face, one organism."

Dyer said, "I think that may be what we have here."

"Those other towers?" asked Ellis.

"They could be connected," Spencer suggested, "associated in some way. All eight of them could be, as a matter of principle, one complex organism."

"We don't know what's in those other towers," said Ellis.

"We could find out," Howard answered.

"No, we can't," objected Spencer. "We don't dare. We've fooled around with them more than was safe. Mac and his crew went for a walk and found the towers and examined them, just casually, you understand, and they came back not knowing how to operate the engines. We can't take the chance of fooling around with them a minute longer than is necessary. Already we may have lost more than we suspect."

"You mean," said Clyne, "that the loss of memory we may have experienced will show up later? That we may not know now we've lost it, but will find later that we did?"

SPENCER nodded. "That's what happened to Mac. He or any member of his crew would have sworn, up to the minute that they tried to start the engines, that they could start them. They took it for granted, just as we take our knowledge for granted. Until we come to use the specific knowledge we have lost, we won't realize we've lost it."

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"It scares you just to think about it," Howard said.

Lang said, "It's some sort of communications system."

"Naturally you'd think so. You're a communications man."

"Those wires."

"And what about the pipes?" asked Howard.

"I have a theory on that one," Spencer told them. "The pipes supply the food."

"Attached to some food supply," said Clyne. "A tank of food buried in the ground."

"More likely roots," Howard put in. "To talk of tanks of food would mean these are transplanted things. They could just as easily be native to this planet."

"They couldn't have built those towers," said Ellis. "If they were native, they'd had to build those towers themselves. Something or someone else built the towers, like a farmer builds a barn to protect his cattle. I'd vote for tanks of food."

Warren spoke for the first time. "What makes you think it's a communications setup?"

Lang shrugged. "Nothing specific. Those wires, I guess, and the studs. It *looks* like a communications rig."

"Communications might fill the bill," Spencer nodded. "But a communications machine built to take in information rather than to pass information along or disseminate it."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Lang. "How would that be communication?"

"I mean," said Spencer, "that something has been robbing us of our memory. It stole our ability to run the engines and it took enough knowledge away from us so we bungled the junkyard job."

"It couldn't be that," said Dyer.

"Why couldn't it?" asked Clyne.

"It's just too damn fantastic."

"NO more fantastic," Spencer told him, "than a lot of other things we've found. Say that egg is a device for gathering knowledge . . ."

"But there's no knowledge to gather here," protested Dyer. "Thousands of years ago, there was knowledge to gather from the rusted ship out there. And then, just a while ago, there was knowledge to gather from the junkyard ship. And now there's us. But the next shipload of knowledge won't come along for *maybe uncounted thousands of* years. It's too long to wait, too big a gamble. Three ships we know of have come here; it would be just as reasonable to suppose that no ship would ever come here. It doesn't make any sense."

"Who said that the knowledge

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had to be collected here? Even back on Earth we forget, don't we?"

"Good Lord!" gasped Clyne, but Spencer rushed ahead.

"If you were some race setting out fish traps for knowledge and had plenty of time to gather it, where would you put your traps? On a planet that swarmed with sentient beings, where the traps might be found and destroyed or their secrets snatched away? Or would you put them on some uninhabited, out-of-the-way planet, some second-rate world that won't be worth a tinker's dam to anyone for another billion years?"

Warren said, "I'd put them on a planet just like this."

"Let me give you the picture," Spencer continued. "Some race is bent on trapping knowledge throughout the Galaxy. So they hunt up the little, insignificant, good-for-nothing planets where they can hide their traps. That way, with traps planted on strategically spaced planets, they sweep all space and there's little chance that their knowledge traps ever will be found."

"You think that's what we've found here?" asked Clyne.

"I'm tossing you the idea," said Spencer, "to see what you think of it. Now let's hear your comments."

"Well, the distance, for one thing—"

"What we have here," said Spencer, "is mechanical telepathy hooked up with a recording device. We know that distance has little to do with the speed of thought waves."

"There's no other basis for this belief beyond speculation?" asked Warren.

"What else can there be? You certainly can't expect proof. We don't dare to get close enough to find out what this egg is. And maybe, even if we could, we haven't got enough knowledge left in us to make an intelligent decision or a correct deduction."

"So we guess again," said Warren.

"Have you some better method?"

Warren shook his head. "No, I don't thi k I have."

XIII

DYER put on a spacesuit, with a rope running from it to the pulley in the tripod set above the tower. He carried wires to connect to the studs. The other ends of the wires were connected to a dozen different instruments to see what might come over them—if anything.

Dyer climbed the tower and they lowered him down into the inside of the tower. Almost immediately, he quit talking to them, so they pulled him out.

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When they loosened the space-suit helmet and hinged it back, he gurgled and blew bubbles at them.

Old Doc gently led him back to sick bay.

Clyne and Pollard worked for hours designing a lead helmet with television installed instead of vision plates. Howard, the biologist, climbed inside the space-suit and was lowered into the tower.

When they hauled him out a minute later, he was crying—like a child. Ellis hurried him after Old Doc and Dyer, with Howard clutching his hands and babbling between sobs.

After ripping the television unit out of the helmet, Pollard was all set to go in the helmet made of solid lead when Warren put a stop to it.

"You keep this up much longer," he told them, "and we'll have no one left."

"This one has a chance of working," Clyne declared. "It might have been the television lead-ins that let them get at Howard."

"It has a chance of not working, too."

"But we have to try."

"Not until I say so."

Pollard started to put the solid helmet on his head.

"Don't put that thing on," said Warren. "You're not going anywhere you'll be needing it."

"I'm going in the tower," Pollard said flatly.

Warren took a step toward him and without warning lashed out with his fist. It caught Pollard on the jaw and crumpled him.

Warren turned to face the rest of them. "If there's anyone else who thinks he wants to argue, I'm ready to begin the discussion —in the same way."

None of them wanted to argue. He could see the tired disgust for him written on their faces.

Spencer said, "You're upset, Warren. You don't know what you're doing."

"I know damned well what I'm doing," Warren retorted. "I know there must be a way to get into that tower and get out again with some of your memory left. But the way you're going about it isn't the right way."

"You know another?" asked Ellis bitterly.

"No, I don't," said Warren. "Not yet."

"What do you want us to do?" demanded Ellis. "Sit around and twiddle our thumbs?"

"I want you to behave like grown men," said Warren, "not like a bunch of crazy kids out to rob an orchard."

He stood and looked at them and none of them had a word to say.

"I have three mewling babies

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on my hands right now," he added. "I don't want any more."

He walked away, up the hill, heading for the ship.

XIV

THEIR memory had been stolen, probably by the egg that squatted in the tower. And although none of them had dared to say the thought aloud, the thing that all of them were thinking was that maybe there was a way to steal that knowledge back, to tap and drain all the rest of the knowledge that was stored within the egg.

Warren sat at his desk and held his head in his hands, trying to think.

Maybe he should have let them go ahead with what they had been doing. But if he had, they'd have kept right on, using variations of the same approach —and when the approach had failed twice, they should have figured out that approach was wrong and tried another.

Spencer had said that they'd lost knowledge and not known they had lost it, and that was the insidious part of the whole situation. They still thought of themselves as men of science, and they were, of course, but not as skilled, not as knowledgable as they once had been.

That was the hell of it—they still thought they were.

They despised him now and that was all right with him. Anything was all right with him if it would help them discover a way to escape.

Forgetfulness, he thought. All through the Galaxy, there was forgetfulness. There were explanations for that forgetfulness, very learned and astute theories on why a being should forget something it had learned. But might not all these explanations be wrong? Might it not be that forgetfulness could be traced, not to some kink within the brain, not to some psychic cause, but to thousands upon thousands of memory traps planted through the Galaxy, traps that tapped and drained and nibbled away at the mass memory of all the sentient beings which lived among the stars?

On Earth a man would forget slowly over the span of many years and that might be because the memory traps that held Earth in their orbit were very far away. But here a man forgot completely and suddenly. Might that not be because he was within the very shadow of the memory traps?

He tried to imagine Operation Mind Trap and it was a shocking concept too big for the brain to grasp. Someone came to the backwoods planets, the good-for-

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nothing planets, the sure-to-be-passed-by planets and set out the memory traps.

They hooked them up in series and built towers to protect them from weather or from accident, and set them operating and connected them to tanks of nutrients buried deep within the soil. Then they went away.

And years later—how many years later, a thousand, ten thousand?—they came back again and emptied the traps of the knowledge they had gathered. As a trapper sets out traps to catch animals for fur, or a fisherman should set the pots for lobsters or drag the seine for fish.

A harvest, Warren thought—a continual, never-ending harvest of the knowledge of the Galaxy.

IF this were true, what kind of race would it be that set the traps? What kind of trapper would be plodding the starways, gathering his catch?

Warren's reason shrank away from the kind of race that it would be.

The creatures undoubtedly came back again, after many years, and emptied the traps of the knowledge they had snared. That must be what they'd do, for why otherwise would they bother to set out the traps? And if they could empty the traps of the knowledge they had caught, that meant there was some way to empty them. And if the trappers themselves could drain off the knowledge, so could another race.

If you could only get inside the tower and have a chance to figure out the way, you could do the job, for probably it was a simple thing, once you had a chance to see it. But you couldn't get inside. If you did, you were robbed of all memory and came out a squalling child. The moment you got inside, the egg grabbed onto your mind and wiped it clean and you didn't even know why you were there or how you'd got there or where you were.

The trick was to get inside and still keep your memory, to get inside and still know what there was to do.

Spencer and the others had tried shielding the brain and shielding didn't work. Maybe there was a way to make it work, but you'd have had to use trial and error methods and that meant too many men coming out with their memories gone before you had the answer. It meant that maybe in just a little while you'd have no men at all.

There must be another way.

When you couldn't shield a thing, what did you do?

A communications problem, Lang had said. Perhaps Lang was right—the egg was a communica-

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tions setup. And what did you do to protect communications? When you couldn't shield a communication, what did you do with it?

There was an answer to that one, of course—you scrambled it.

But there was no solution there, nor any hint of a solution. He sat and listened and there was no sound. No one had stopped by to see him; no one had dropped in to pass the time of day.

They're sore, he thought. They're off sulking in a corner. They're giving me the silent treatment.

To hell with them, he said.

He sat alone and tried to think and there were no thoughts, just a mad merry-go-round of questions revolving in his skull.

Finally there were footsteps on the stairs and from their unsteadiness, he knew whose they were.

It was Bat Ears coming up to comfort him and Bat Ears had a skin full.

He waited, listening to the stumbling feet tramping up the stairs, and Bat Ears finally appeared. He stood manfully in the doorway, putting out both hands and bracing them against the jambs on either side of him to keep the place from swaying.

BAT EARS nerved himself and plunged across the space from doorway to chair and grabbed the chair and hung onto it and wrestled himself into it and looked up at Warren with a smirk of triumph.

"Made it," Bat Ears said.

"You're drunk," snapped Warren disgustedly.

"Sure, I'm drunk. It's lonesome being drunk all by yourself. Here . . ."

He found his pocket and hauled the bottle out and set it gingerly on the desk.

"There you are," he said. "Let's you and me go and hang one on."

Warren stared at the bottle and listened to the little imp of thought that jigged within his brain.

"No, it wouldn't work."

"Cut out the talking and start working on that jug. When you get through with that one, I got another hid out."

"Bat Ears," said Warren.

"What do you want?" asked Bat Ears. "I never saw a man that wanted—"

"How much more have you got?"

"How much more what, Ira?"

"Liquor. How much more do you have stashed away?"

"Lots of it. I always bring along a marg . . . a marg . . ."

"A margin?"

"That's right," said Bat Ears. "That is what I meant. I always figure what I need and then bring along a margin just in case we

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get marooned or something."

Warren reached out and took the bottle. He uncorked it and threw the cork away.

"Bat Ears," he said, "go and get another bottle."

Bat Ears blinked at him. "Right away, Ira? You mean right away?"

"Immediately," said Warren. "And on your way, would you stop and tell Spencer that I want to see him soon as possible?"

Bat Ears wobbled to his feet. He regarded Warren with forthright admiration.

"What you planning on doing, Ira?" he demanded.

"I'm going to get drunk," said Warren. "I'm going to hang one on that will make history in the survey fleet."

XV

"YOU can't do it, man," protested Spencer. "You haven't got a chance."

Warren put out a hand against the tower and tried to hold himself a little steadier, for the whole planet was gyrating at a fearful pace.

"Bat Ears," Warren called out.

"Yes, Ira."

"Shoot the — *hic* — man who tries to shtop me."

"I'll do that, Ira," Bat Ears assured him.

"But you're going in there unprotected," Spencer said anxiously. "Without even a spacesuit."

"I'm trying out a new appro . . . appro . . ."

"Approach?" supplied Bat Ears.

"Thash it," said Warren. "I thank you, Bat Ears. Thash exactly what I'm doing."

Lang said, "It's got a chance. We tried to shield ourselves and it didn't work. He's trying a new approach. He's scrambled up his mind with liquor. I think he might have a chance."

"The shape he's in," said Spencer, "he'll never get the wires connected."

Warren wobbled a little. "The hell you shay."

He stood and blurredly watched them. Where there had been three of each of them before, there now, in certain cases, were only two of them.

"Bat Ears."

"Yes, Ira."

"I need another drink. It's wearing off a little."

Bat Ears took the bottle from his pocket and handed it across. It was not quite half full. Warren tipped it up and drank, his Adam's apple bobbing. He did not quit drinking until the last of it was gone. He let the bottle drop and looked at them again. This time there were three of each of them and it was all right.

He turned to face the tower.

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"Now," he said, "if you gen'-men will jush —"

Ellis and Clyne hauled on the rope and Warren sailed into the air.

"Hey, there!" he shouted. "Wha' you trying to do?"

He had forgotten about the pulley rigged on the tripod above the tower.

He dangled in the air, kicking and trying to get his balance, with the blackness of the tower's mouth looming under him and a funny, shining glow at the bottom of it.

Above him the pulley creaked and he shot down and was inside the tower.

He could see the thing at the bottom now. He hiccoughed politely and told it to move over, he was coming down. It didn't move an inch. Something tried to take his head off and it didn't come off.

The earphones said, "Warren, you all right? You all right? Talk to us."

"Sure," he said. "Sure, all right. Wha' matter wish you?"

THEY let him down and he stood beside the funny thing that pulsated in the pit. He felt something digging at his brain and laughed aloud, a gurgling, drunken laugh.

"Get your handsh out my hair," he said. "You tickle."

"Warren," said the earphones. "The wires. The wires. You remember, we talked about the wires."

"Sure," he said. "The wires."

There were little studs on the pulsating thing and they'd be fine things to attach a wire to.

Wires? What the hell were wires?

"Hooked on your belt," said the earphones. "The wires are hooked on your belt."

His hand moved to his belt and he found the wires. He fumbled with them and they slipped out of his fingers and he got down and scrabbled around and grabbed hold of them again. They were all tangled up and he couldn't make head or tail of them and what was he messing around with wires for, anyhow?

What he wanted was another drink — another little drink.

He sang: "*I'm a ramblin' wreck from Georgia Tech and a hell of an engineer!*"

He said to the egg: "Friend, I'd be mosh pleashed if you'd join me in a drink."

The earphones said, "Your friend can't drink until you get those wires hooked up. He can't hear without the wires hooked up. He can't tell what you're saying until you get those wires hooked up.

"You understand, Warren? Hook up the wires. He can't hear

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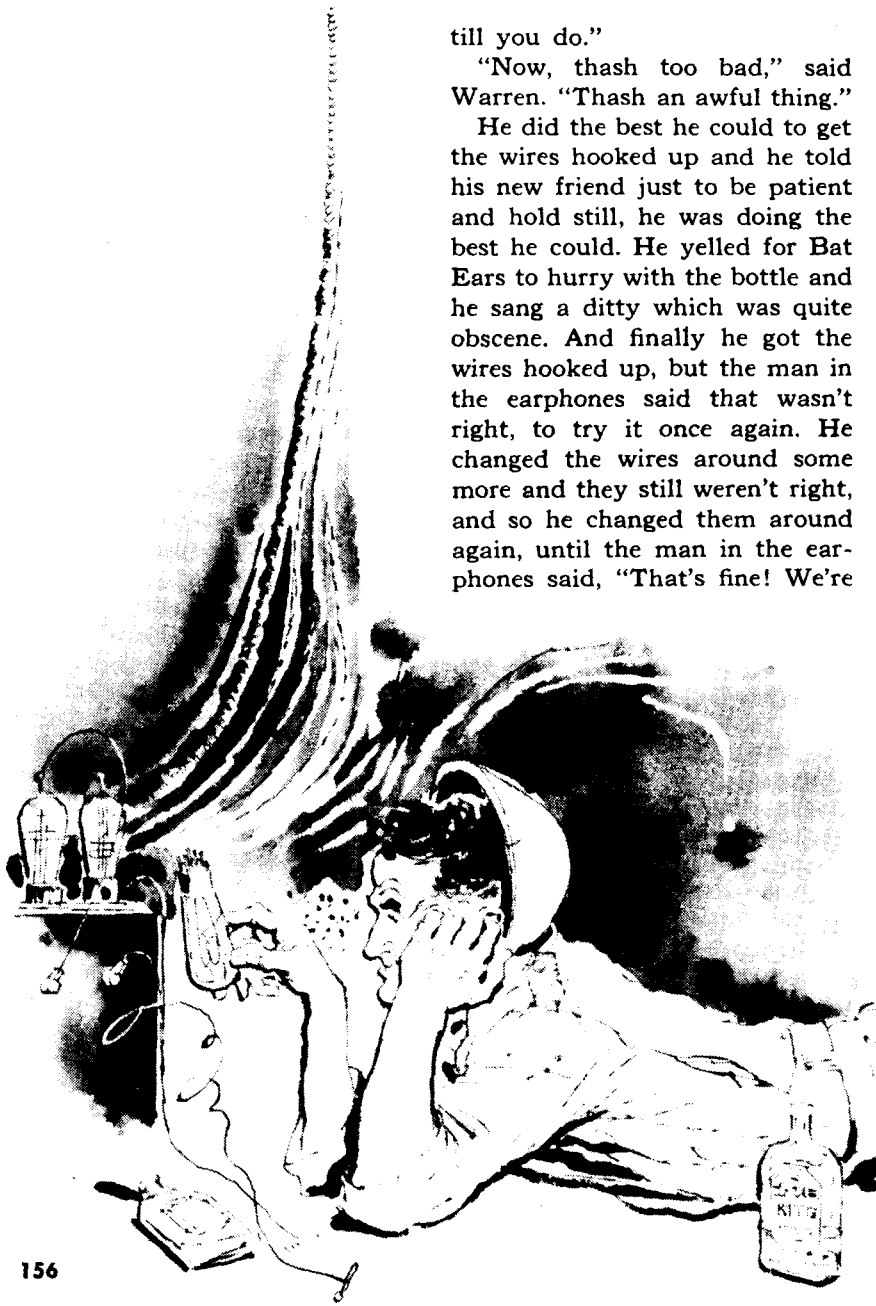
till you do."

"Now, thash too bad," said Warren. "Thash an awful thing."

He did the best he could to get the wires hooked up and he told his new friend just to be patient and hold still, he was doing the best he could. He yelled for Bat Ears to hurry with the bottle and he sang a ditty which was quite obscene. And finally he got the wires hooked up, but the man in the earphones said that wasn't right, to try it once again. He changed the wires around some more and they still weren't right, and so he changed them around again, until the man in the earphones said, "That's fine! We're



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getting something now!"

And then someone hauled him out of there before he even had a drink with his pal.

XVI

HE stumbled up the stairs and negotiated his way around the desk and plopped into the chair. Someone had fastened a steel bowl securely over the top half of his head and two men, or possibly three, were banging it with hammer, and his mouth had a wool blanket wadded up in it, and he could have sworn that at any moment he'd drop dead of thirst.

He heard footsteps on the stairs and hoped that it was Bat Ears, for Bat Ears would know what to do.

But it was Spencer.

"How're you feeling?" Spencer asked.

"Awful," Warren groaned.

"You turned the trick!"

"That tower business?"

"You hooked up the wires," said Spencer, "and the stuff is rolling out. Lang has a recorder hooked up and we're taking turns listening in and the stuff we're getting is enough to set your teeth on edge."

"Stuff?"

"Certainly. The knowledge that mind trap has been collecting. It'll take us years to sort out all the knowledge and try to correlate it. Some of it is just in snatches and some of it is fragmentary, but we're getting lots of it in hunks."

"Some of our own stuff being fed back to us?"

"A little. But mostly alien."

"Anything on the engines?"

Spencer hesitated. "No, not on *our* engines. That is —"

"Well?"

"We got the dope on the junkyard engine. Pollard's already at work. Mac and the boys are helping him get it assembled."

"It'll work?"

"Better than what we have. We'll have to modify our tubes

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and make some other changes."

"And you're going to —"

Spencer nodded. "We're ripping out our engines."

Warren couldn't help it. He couldn't have helped it if he'd been paid a million dollars. He put his arms down on the desk and hid his face in them and shouted raucously with incoherent laughter.

After a time he looked up again and mopped at laughter-watered eyes.

"I fail to see —" Spencer began stiffly.

"Another junkyard," Warren said. "Oh, God, another junkyard!"

"It's not so funny, Warren. It's brain-shaking — a mass of knowledge such as no one ever dreamed of. Knowledge that had been accumulating for years, maybe a thousand years. Ever since that other race came and emptied the trap and then went away again."

"LOOK," said Warren, "couldn't we wait until we came across the knowledge of our engines? Surely it will come out soon. It went in, was fed in, whatever you want to call it, later than any of the rest of this stuff you are getting. If we'd just wait, we'd have the knowledge that we lost. We wouldn't have to go to all the work of ripping out the engines and replacing them."

SPENCER shook his head. "Lang figured it out. There seems to be no order or sequence in the way we get the information. The chances are that we might have to wait for a long, long time. We have no way of knowing how long the information will keep pouring out. Lang thinks for maybe years. But there's something else. We've got to get away as soon as possible."

"What's the matter with you, Spencer?"

"I don't know."

"You're afraid of something. Something's got you scared."

Spencer bent over and grasped the desk edge with his hands, hanging on.

"Warren, it's not only knowledge in that thing. We're monitoring it and we know. There's also—"

"I'll take a guess," said Warren. "There's personality."

He saw the stricken look on Spencer's face.

"Quit monitoring it," ordered Warren sharply. "Turn the whole thing off. Let's get out of here."

"We can't. Don't you understand? We can't! There are certain points. We are —"

"Yes, I know," said Warren. "You are men of science. Also downright fools."

"But there are things coming out of that tower that —"

"Shut it off!"

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"No," said Spencer obstinately. "I can't. I won't."

"I warn you," Warren said grimly, "if any of you turn alien, I'll shoot you without hesitation."

"Don't be a fool." Spencer turned sharply about and went out the door.

Warren sat, sober now, listening to Spencer's feet go down the steps.

It was all very clear to Warren now.

Now he knew why there had been evidence of haste in that other ship's departure, why supplies had been left behind and tools still lying where they had been dropped as the crew had fled.

After a while Bat Ears came up the stairs, lugging a huge pot of coffee and a couple of cups.

He set the cups down on the desk and filled them, then banged down the pot.

"Ira," he said, "it was a black day when you gave up your drinking."

"How is that?" asked Warren.

"Because there ain't no one, nowhere, who can hang one on like you."

THEY sat silently, gulping the hot, black coffee.

Then Bat Ears said, "I still don't like it."

"Neither do I," admitted Warren.

"The cruise is only half over," said Bat Ears.

"The cruise is completely over," Warren told him bluntly. "When we lift out of here, we're heading straight for Earth."

They drank more coffee.

Warren asked: "How many on our side, Bat Ears?"

"There's you and me," said Bat Ears, "and Mac and the four engineers. That's seven."

"Eight," corrected Warren. "Don't forget Doc. He hasn't been doing any monitoring."

"Doc don't count for nothing one way or the other."

"In a pinch, he still can handle a gun."

After Bat Ears had gone, Warren sat and listened to the sound of Mac's crew ripping out the engines and he thought of the long way home. Then he got up and strapped on a gun and went out to see how things were shaping up.

—CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

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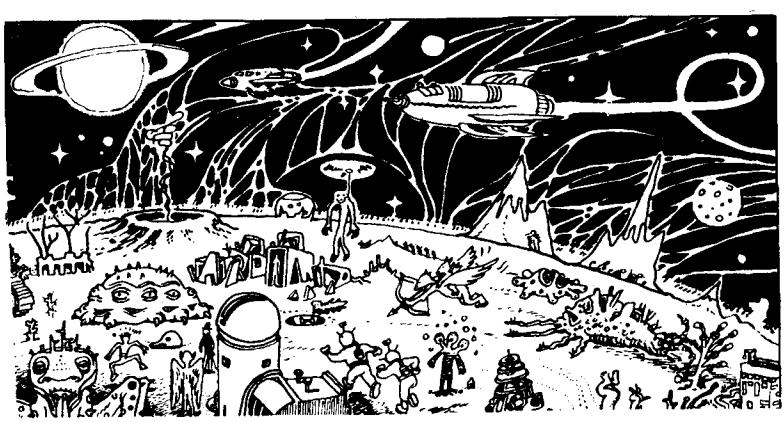
FORECAST

Next month, you're due for a relentlessly suspenseful novella, TANGLE HOLD by F. L. Wallace, a breathless story of Venus and the oddest sort of engineer you've ever encountered. It's his skill that gets him into trouble to begin with, but that isn't what makes him unwittingly the greatest force for good on that cloudy planet—which might have been all right, except that what was good for Venus was pure murder for him!

J. T. M'Intosh's novelet, FIRST LADY, offers an entirely different type of problem: The task of Terran Control is to explore, subdue and integrate raw new worlds into the galactic economy, which naturally means nasty jobs for its agents. The nastiest job, though, is not what you might expect—it's taking a dazed young girl out into space to rule over an all-male planet!

There's an equally disquieting situation in the second novelet in the issue, COLONY by Philip K. Dick. It's bad enough to have an alien enemy, of course, but worse still when you can't be sure it *is* an enemy. But what happens when you can't even find it in the first place?

Short stories, features . . . and don't forget that Willy Ley answers all science questions either by mail or in FOR YOUR INFORMATION. What's on *your* mind? Don't keep it to yourself; let Mr. Ley explain it to you. But please type or print so your letter will be legible, hold down the number of questions to no more than two or three, and sign your name and address in case the answer must be mailed.



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